

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

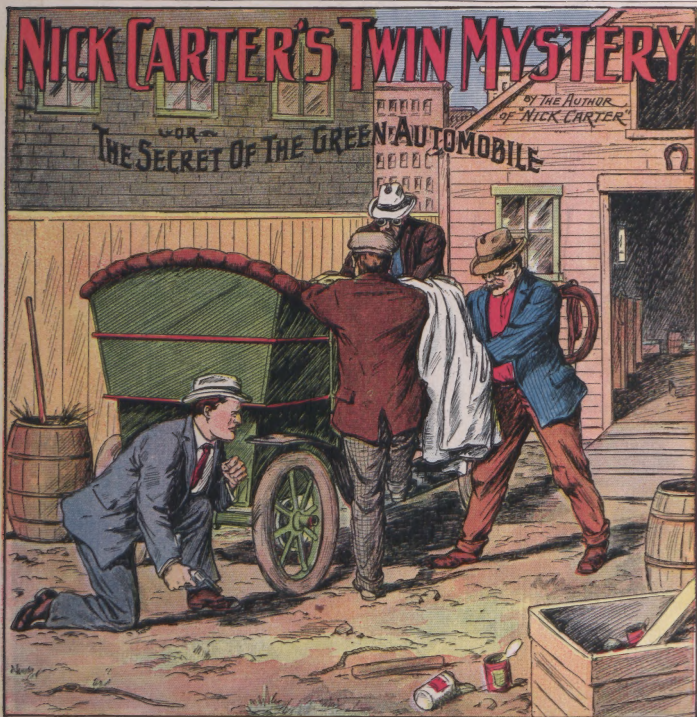


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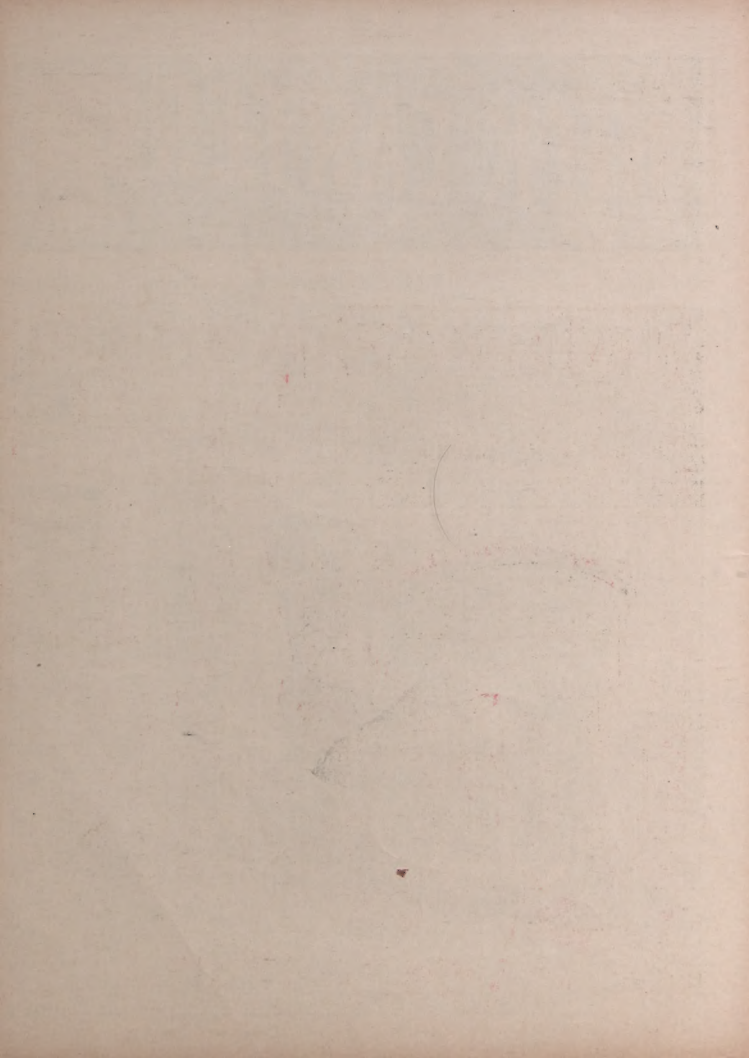
No. 511

NEW YORK, OCTOBER 13, 1906.

Price, Five Cents



Nick leaped down from the car and hid behind it as the three men lifted the inanimate bundle from the tonneau and carried it into the stable.





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NICK CARTER'S TWIN MYSTERY;

OR,

The Secret of the Green Automobile.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A BIT OF RIBBON.

Nick Carter was lazily occupied with a cigar and book in his luxurious apartments on a balmy June afternoon.

It was the boast of the great detective that he could enjoy a loaf as well as any hobo he ever had known. That was true. But modesty forbade his adding, what everybody knew, that when engaged in tracking to its heart some criminal mystery, he often worked for a week or more, with only two or three hours' rest at long intervals.

He had that valuable endowment, possessed by most men who have accomplished great things, of being able to concentrate his attention on a task until finished, and then forgetting it altogether, while storing up energy for the next undertaking.

So Nick Carter lolled back in his swing-chair near the window on that sunny afternoon, soothed by the murmur of traffic, and perilously near dropping into a doze.

Ting-a-ling-a-ling!

A telephone call.

Down went the book, and the detective had the telephone-receiver to his ear, as he leaned over his table and responded:

"Hello! Yes, this is Mr. Carter. What's that? Police headquarters? Detective bureau? The chief wants to see me right away? All right! I'm coming."

There was no laziness about Nick Carter now.

He hung up the receiver with a snap, snatched his hat from the sofa, where it had been thrown, and made for the elevator, his room door closing with a spring-lock.

Twenty minutes later he leaped from a hansom cab as it drew up at the main entrance of police headquarters, in Mulberry Street, and went straight to the private office of Chief Fox, of the detective bureau.

"Well, Mr. Carter, I am up against it," began the chief, a stalwart, ruddy-faced man of forty, as he opened his door, to make sure there were no eavesdroppers, and closed it with a bang.

"Of course," responded Carter carelessly. "Or you would not have sent for me. Well, what is it?"

"A mysterious disappearance."

"Ah!"

"Yes, but this is not a common case," went on the chief irritably. "We have disappearances every day of one kind and another, and usually we can explain them, even if we do not find the missing person. But now we have to find——"

"A young lady, the daughter of a millionaire banker,

who vanished a week ago, and whose initials are M. T.," interrupted Nick coolly, trimming his nails with a penknife.

Chief Fox rose from his chair and walked over to the detective, looking him straight in the eyes, as he asked, in blank astonishment:

"Nick Carter, are you the—"

"You needn't speak his Satanic majesty's name, chief," laughed the other. "I assure you I am not the personage you were about to mention. But am I right about the young lady?"

"Of course you are. But how did you find it out? The family have kept it absolutely quiet, on account of the girl's mother, who is an invalid. They are afraid the papers will get hold of it. In that case the mother might hear of it, and that would mean her death, in all probability. Her trouble is with her heart."

Nick nodded.

"She is at the county place of the family, Headlands, on the Hudson," continued Fox, "but she insists on knowing all that is in the newspapers, and it would be impossible to hide this matter from her if it were printed at all."

"Then it must not be printed," declared Carter, returning his penknife to his pocket and dropping his careless manner. "Tell me the particulars, as briefly as possible."

When the famous detective got down to business in this way it meant that he wanted to know all there was to be related.

Chief Fox had had many dealings with him, and knew his ways.

It was not the first time the head of the detective bureau had been obliged to enlist the acumen and wide knowledge of Nick Carter in a puzzling case, and he appreciated the necessity of giving every detail when laying before the world-renowned expert the problem to be attacked.

"When and where was this disappearance?" asked Carter.

"A week ago to-day, at four o'clock in the afternoon, in front of her father's mansion."

"Her name?"

"Miriam Tollemache."

"Ah! that is my information. Go on. Her father is—"

"Roderick Tollemache, banker, of the Wall Street district, a multimillionaire."

"Yes?"

"Miriam is twenty years of age, of medium height, dark, and very beautiful."

"Lovers?"

The chief shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear Mr. Carter, Miss Tollemache was presented in society two years ago, and, of course, knows a great many men of her own set. But I don't know about lovers. Young women of the exclusive circles don't usually have what other girls call 'steady company' until their engagement is formally announced."

Nick Carter smiled, as he remarked calmly: "Human nature is much the same, whether one has a hundred millions or nothing. This young girl may have a lover, wealthy as her father is."

"Possibly," returned the chief carelessly. "But you do not think Miriam Tollemache has eloped, do you?"

"No. What were the circumstances of her going away?"

"She had just come down the steps of her father's house, in Fifth Avenue, for a drive, with her companion, Miss Whitmore, who was already in the carriage—an open barouche."

"Who is Miss Whitmore?"

"A cousin of Miriam's, I believe, whose parents are not wealthy, and who probably are glad to let their daughter share the luxurious life of her cousin in return for her acting as a sort of chaperon. Miss Whitmore is several years older than Miss Tollemache."

"Go on."

The footman at the door of the house had let Miriam out and watched her down the steps. Then, as she was passing into the care of the liveried servant holding the handle of the carriage door, he went inside."

Nick Carter was becoming interested. The chief continued:

"Just as Miriam reached the sidewalk, where there happened to be no pedestrians for the moment, the two horses attached to the carriage became nervous at a passing automobile—"

"What color was the automobile?"

Chief Fox looked annoyed at the interruption.

"What difference does that make?" he asked pettishly.

"What color was the automobile?" repeated Nick impassively.

"Green, I believe. I know it was. At least, that is what I was told by the coachman."

"Yes? And when the horses became restless, what then?"

"The footman went to their heads and helped to quiet them. When he turned around again to open the carriage door, Miriam was not there."

"Not where?"

"Not standing on the sidewalk, where he had seen her a moment before. She had vanished as if the stones had swallowed her."

"What did he do?"

"Ran up the steps, after satisfying himself that Miss Whitmore was alone in the open carriage, and asked the two liveried men in the hall if they had seen Miss Miriam."

"They had not, of course?"

"Of course not. She had not returned to the house. She was not in the carriage. She was not on the sidewalk. She was nowhere in sight."

Nick Carter arose from his chair and looked out of a window for a few moments. He was thinking.

"Why did the footman go to the horses' heads? Did the coachman ask him to do so?"

"I don't know. But it was natural for the footman to help when he saw that there might be a runaway."

"The Tollemache residence is opposite Central Park. Is there any park gate near there?"

"Not within many blocks. But it would be easy for any one to get over the park wall. Still, Miss Miriam Tollemache did not go that way, because Miss Whitmore happened to be looking across the road at the park when her cousin vanished."

"No agile lover could have slipped up to Miriam and whisked her over the park wall while the footman's back was turned?" suggested Nick.

Chief Fox snorted impatiently.

"I tell you that Miss Whitmore was looking at the park. A pair of blue-birds were quarreling in a tree, she

told me, and she was so interested in them that she saw nothing else."

"Pity! The mansion is near the corner of a street. I forget what street, but that does not matter. Did the footman look around the corner?"

"I don't know."

"Didn't you ask him?"

There was such a touch of contemptuous surprise in Nick Carter's tone that Fox resented it hotly:

"Look here, Mr. Carter, I think you have cross-examined me enough. I asked all the questions I thought necessary when I had that footman here, but I did not ask him whether he looked around the corner, because I could not see what bearing that could have on the case. If the girl had gone that way, she must have passed him, and he would have seen her."

"Nevertheless, I should have asked him. What is the footman's name?"

Chief Fox took a notebook from his pocket and read: "William Cantor, No. 781 Twenty-fourth Street."

"Then that is all of it, eh, chief?" asked Nick, as he copied the address into a notebook of his own.

"Yes. The footman was discharged immediately for negligence in not keeping his eyes on the young lady. That is why his address is in Twenty-fourth Street."

"I understood that."

There came a loud rap at the door, followed by an altercation between the policeman on guard and some one who wanted to see the chief.

"That is Simmons, headquarters man of the *Evening Echo*," remarked Fox, as he swung the door open.

A young fellow, his face red and hot and his straw hat on the back of his head, banged past the big policeman who tried to bar his way, and flung himself into the room.

"What is it, Simmons?" asked the chief, with a smile, for he made it a point to be always friendly with reporters.

"Here is our latest edition. I came to ask what you are going to do about this."

The chief snatched the paper, and read aloud, head-lines and all:

"Miriam Tollemache slain! Dead body of millionaire's daughter washed ashore at Rockaway! All her jewelry gone, and evidence that she was strangled to death. Probably murdered in the city, and then taken out to sea and thrown overboard, with stone attached to neck. Horrible discovery by a fisherman."

"Those are the head-lines, are they not, chief?" asked Nick.

"Yes. The story below is very short. It merely repeats the head-lines in fuller detail, but no new point. Stop! Yes; here is something." He read: "Around the neck was a long crimson ribbon, tied tightly, with the loose end showing that it had been cut away by some jagged edge. It is supposed that a heavy weight had been attached to the ribbon, to hold the body down, but that the ribbon was cut by sawing across a sharp rock or other stationary-object at the bottom of the sea."

"I should like to see that ribbon," observed Nick.

"Here is a bit of it. This is my story. I telephoned it to the paper from the morgue. I know the boys there, and they allowed me to cut a bit of the ribbon off the end," put in Simmons.

"They did?" howled Chief Fox. "Well, I'll see about

that. What right had they to do that? The coroner will have something to say. I'll just call him up by telephone."

"I wouldn't do that, chief," interposed Carter. "Of course, Simmons should not have done it, but as he has, I wish you would let me have that bit of ribbon. It might help. I'll be answerable if there is any trouble over it."

"Well, of course, Mr. Carter, if you make a point of it, I have nothing more to say. It is lucky for you, Simmons, that Mr. Carter is here, or I should have had to tell the coroner, and it might have proved an ugly business for you."

Simmons did not seem much impressed by Chief Fox's words. He was ruefully watching Nick Carter place the scrap of ribbon in an envelope and then transfer it to an inner pocket.

"I wanted that ribbon, to have a photograph made of it for my paper," grumbled Simmons. "It is of a peculiar pattern, flowers and things."

"I noticed that," replied Nick quietly. "I don't think we will have a picture of it in your paper—at present. Good day, gentlemen."

Chief Fox and Simmons, the *Echo* reporter, were still looking at each other, bewildered by Nick Carter's sudden departure, as the great detective walked briskly to his cab and was driven away.

CHAPTER II.

SEEKING A CLUE.

As the cab was driven up-town, by way of the Bowery and Fourth Avenue, the driver leaned over the trap in the roof and listened to a few remarks by his fare, which seemed to be made casually.

Nick Carter was cautious at all times, and he knew that it would look peculiar for him to turn in his seat and enter into conversation with his cab-driver for any length of time.

Nevertheless, he was talking steadily, as he puffed with seeming carelessness at his cigar.

"You can't lose him, eh, Chick?" he asked, as he looked straight ahead.

Chick, lieutenant of Nick Carter, who had become a cab-driver for the time being, at the command of his chief, growled a disgusted "No."

"Where is he?" asked Carter.

"On the west side of the street, keeping up with our cab, and we are scooting along as fast as we can go, with these blessed blockades stopping us every few yards."

"All right. I see him. It is Bill the Brute. He must have watched me leave headquarters. Drive to the Tollemache place and don't speak to me till you get there. Bill is quicker-witted than most thugs."

There was a confusion of traffic in the Bowery, for it was six o'clock, when cross-town streets were full of heavy trucks and crowded street-cars trying to get past, while the regular stream of life in the Bowery was swollen to the point of congestion.

Nick had his eyes on a powerful-looking man, built like a freight-car, with a bullet head and red-rimmed eyes, who was gazing furtively about him from beneath the pulled-down brim of a white soft hat.

It was Bill the Brute, a crook with a police record,

who had done his "bit" of three years in Sing Sing for highway robbery, and had been released only two weeks before.

Bill was evidently shadowing the cab.

There was a greater confusion than ever at Grand Street, and Chick was obliged to use all his skill in getting his cab past the corner.

By the time he had accomplished this, Bill the Brute had disappeared from the view of both Nick Carter and his man, Chick.

"Strange!" thought Nick. "I wonder what that fellow is after."

Then he went on puffing at his cigar comfortably, as he decided that it was only the natural curiosity of a criminal who knew him as a detective to find out what was doing, and whether possibly he—the criminal—might be concerned.

"I have not seen anything of Bill since he came down from up the river until to-day," muttered Nick. "He may have been busy with two or three jobs since he again conferred the inestimable benefit of his presence on New York after his three years of retirement. Well, I don't connect Bill with this business. It is not a professional job, even though the poor girl's jewelry has disappeared. But robbery was not the motive. At least, not the only one."

Nick Carter was beginning to formulate in his mind a pretty complete theory as to how Miriam Tollemache had been spirited away and killed.

If his theory should prove correct, it would involve some personages whose names had never been seen in print except in the society columns and the Elite Directory.

It was this fact that made Nick proceed cautiously.

He had known Roderick Tollemache for years, having been once engaged to hunt down a gang who had come into possession of valuable securities by the rude process of finding their way into the banker's safe in his home.

In that case the detective had restored the papers, worth a matter of nearly half a million dollars, to the banker, and had proved his discretion by keeping the whole matter out of the knowledge of the police when it was found that the moving spirit in the robbery was a young man of Roderick Tollemache's own family.

Mr. Tollemache, proud and distant to the world as he was, had expressed his gratitude to the detective and given him his entire confidence.

Unknown to Chief Fox, Nick had been busy on the disappearance of Miriam Tollemache ever since the day she had vanished, but had been baffled so persistently that he had taken an afternoon off, as we have seen.

Now he seemed to have reached one sad stage of the inquiry, in the death of the young girl, and all that remained was to hunt down her murderer.

The cab soon reached the Tollemache mansion, and Nick was not long in getting to the upper room, where already lay, in a wilderness of lilies and white roses, all that remained of the young girl who had so lately been full of bounding life and joy.

Roderick Tollemache, a distinguished-looking man, with gray military mustache and iron-gray hair, had motioned the attendants out of the room ere he removed the white silken covering from the face of the dead.

"She is changed considerably, from the action of the water and the bruises her poor face suffered," muttered the tall, soldierly-looking man brokenly, as he rested one

arm on the detective's shoulder. "But it is my Miriam. There is no doubt about that."

"She wore jewelry?" asked Nick.

"Yes, including a diamond necklace, valued at \$20,000."

Nick did not speak again immediately, for he was looking closely at the face of the girl, which, as Mr. Tollemache had said, was much bruised and disfigured, but was still recognizable as that of the unfortunate Miriam.

"Has the coroner given permission for burial?" asked Nick, as he and the banker left the room and descended to the library.

"Not yet. He was here this afternoon, and will come again to-night, he told me. Then, I suppose, he will give me the necessary order, for there is no reason why the inquiry he is conducting should bring him or his assistants to the house again."

"The evening papers will not get to Mrs. Tollemache, at Headlands, will they? I would have kept the case out of print if there had been anything less tragic than what has happened," murmured Nick. "But it would be impossible to suppress anything of this kind, with the police and coroner accessible to the reporters. Twenty thousand dollars! H'm!"

"I will try to keep the papers away from her," returned the banker, with a groan. "But I fear it will be impossible. Mrs. Tollemache has a strong will of her own, and would be capable of going out to the village for papers herself, if they were kept away from her in the house. It is common knowledge that Mrs. Tollemache and I are separated, but I would not have her worried even though we are nothing to each other now."

There was a little more conversation between Nick and Mr. Tollemache, and then the detective went down to where his cab was waiting and whispered a direction to Chick.

The cab rattled down to the foot of West Twenty-third Street, stopping in the midst of the crowd of vehicles in front of the Pennsylvania ferry-house.

Nick Carter was not in the cab.

It was not the style of the detective to allow himself to be shadowed, if it could be avoided, and he had found a way of getting out of the cab before it reached its destination, without even Chick knowing exactly when he had disappeared.

In a tumble-down frame house, or rather shanty, near a lumber-yard, not far from the foot of Twenty-fourth Street, Nick Carter expected to pick up a clue to the cause of Miriam Tollemache's death.

The shanty appeared to be empty, for there was a wooden shutter, fastened inside, at the lower front window of what, by courtesy, might be called the parlor. The door was locked and bolted, and another door at the back was also secured.

The shanty looked like a crazy old place that one might almost blow down with a puff, but it did not take the detective long to find that it was a veritable fortress.

"Just what I thought," he muttered. "There is no 787 Twenty-fourth Street, of course. But I know that this is where my footman, William Cantor, is likely to be found. It is just as well to know something about these things, in case you want to utilize facts. It was a lucky thing that I got a line on Mr. Cantor three months ago. I did not know then that I should want the information at some future time. That is the peculiarity of running down crime. Every bit of knowledge one acquires is sure

to come in handy sooner or later—each patch has its place in the whole quilt."

While Nick Carter thus soliloquized he was inspecting the house from all sides, to see how he could enter.

"I am going to get in, of course," he told himself. "But how? Ah! Here is the solution."

A narrow window leading to the cellar was revealed behind a bunch of half-dried grass at the back of the shanty, and Nick saw that the glass had been broken out long ago.

Evidently the persons within considered the window safe, both because it was hidden by the grass and on account of the opening being so small.

Nick Carter inspected the opening for a moment and then took off his coat and vest, which he hid beneath the crazy old steps to the back door.

"It will be a tight squeeze, but I can do it," he muttered.

It was a tight squeeze, but the detective was not stout, although powerfully built, and he managed to wriggle through in less time than would have been thought possible by any one who had compared the window and his form.

Once in the cellar, Nick determined that he would find his way into the house proper.

There was a flight of steps leading to a trap-door, which was secured on the upper side.

It would not have taken the detective many minutes to force this trap-door, had he tried, but he did not try.

He heard voices so near to him that he was not sure whether they were in the kitchen or in the front room, or "parlor."

He listened intently, but beyond assuring himself that there were three persons engaged in the conversation, and that one of them was a woman, he could not tell what the little party was all about.

Through the chinks of the flooring which formed the roof of the cellar he could make out that there was artificial light in both rooms, indicating that all daylight had been excluded.

From the steadiness with which the talk progressed, he was convinced that his own presence was not suspected.

"I did not think there was any likelihood of their seeking me," he muttered. "It is nearly dark, for one thing, and then I kept behind barrels and trees as much as I could."

The shanty stood in its own yard, and there were three old locust trees close by the house, which had afforded Nick considerable protection from possible observation while he was seeking a means of ingress.

He had made up his mind that the first clue to be followed was the doings of William Cantor, the footman.

That gentleman had gone into the service of Roderick Tollemache with excellent references from England, and, besides, had been in the employ of one of New York's best-known society women for a month, with perfect satisfaction to the lady, only leaving her because she had sailed for Europe.

He had been in the household of Roderick Tollemache for two months, and his record for that period had been impeccable.

All this Nick Carter knew, but he wanted to be informed a little further on the antecedents and connections of this paragon.

He listened a few moments, and then determined to take a chance in raising the trap-door.

With a strong knife which he always carried, he forced back the bolts securing the trap-door and raised it a little, finding that a chair stood upon the heavy lid.

A little ingenuity was required to get the chair away without making a noise. But Nick Carter was used to difficult feats accomplished noiselessly.

He found himself in a kitchen, more comfortably furnished than might have been expected from the tumble-down appearance of the house outside.

There was a kitchen range in which were the remains of a fire, while plates and dishes on the table told of a supper that had been enjoyed by several persons, apparently.

The talking in the next room was much easier to hear now than from the cellar.

Nick stole to the door and peeped through the key-hole.

He started back in surprise, for the three persons he saw were as incongruous as any one ever came across in such a place as this old shanty.

Seated around a table, in the center of which was a large, gaudy lamp, in keeping with the cheap and garish furniture of the room and the highly colored chromo pictures, in gilded frames on the walls, were two men and a woman.

One of the men was Bill the Brute and the other William Cantor, the footman, while the third personage was a richly attired young woman, whose white ungloved hand, sparkling with diamonds, was beating the table emphatically as she talked in a low tone.

Nick caught the words, "Miriam Tollemache," but could not hear what else was said.

Just then, the richly dressed speaker turned her head, so that the light of the lamp fell full upon her face.

The detective started back in astonishment.

The young woman was Miss Grace Whitmore, cousin of Miriam Tollemache!

CHAPTER III.

THE MAN IN GOGGLES.

What could this delicate, carefully nurtured young woman be doing here, in this shady den, in company with Bill the Brute and the man who had been a menial in her uncle's house?

"You are sure there is no suspicion, Miss Whitmore?" asked William Cantor, as the girl ceased speaking.

"Hush! Don't mention my name," she returned apprehensively, as she looked about the room. "Call me Mary Brown, if you speak of me at all. It would be my ruin if any one knew that I came to this place."

"Oh, dat's all right, loidy," broke in Bill the Brute. "You kin tell dem youse wuz slummin'. Dat's a song-an'-dance dat allers goes. Dey's lots o' swell dames 'um up Fift' Avenoo dat knows Chinytown an' udder sporty parts o' dis ol' town ez well ez I does, an' no one don't mek no holler, neider. It's de lum-tum t'ing ter do in dese days. Haw! haw! haw!"

Bill the Brute laughed coarsely.

He reached forth his big paw and touched with his forefinger the sparkling gems on Grace Whitmore's fingers, putting his finger to his tongue facetiously afterward.

Grace Whitmore drew her hand away with a low exclamation of disgust.

Bill the Brute frowned.

"Say, youse don't need ter be so hanky-panky over it. I wuzn't tryin' ter swipe de sparks. I t'ought dey might taste o' alum, dat wuz all. Dey's one t'ing. I wants ter know when I'm goin' ter git some dough. Dis job ain't in my line exactly. I ain't used ter bein' mixed up wit' de swells. When I am, it's de mon fer me, or de whole t'ing is on de bum. See?"

"There is a thousand dollars for expenses," replied Grace Whitmore, producing a leather pocketbook and offering it to William Cantor.

"Dat's all right," growled Bill the Brute, snatching the pocketbook. "I'm de cashier o' dis push."

He ran over the bills, which were ten \$100 notes, and gave five of them to Cantor, who put them in his pocket, as Bill the Brute offered the empty pocketbook to the young lady.

"Keep it," she directed, turning from him.

"Miss Whitmore does not care for Bill," observed Nick Carter to himself. "I should like to know how she comes to be here with him."

He soon learned, for Grace Whitmore continued, addressing herself to both of her companions, but apparently not looking in the direction of Bill the Brute often than necessary.

"When I got the letter at my home in Brooklyn, yesterday, telling me to come here to-day, at four o'clock, if I wanted to learn the whereabouts of my cousin, Miriam Tollemache, and directing me to bring a thousand dollars for expenses, I did not feel disposed to do so at first."

"But you reconsidered, eh, mum?" put in Cantor, his smug face and little eyes breaking into a sneering smile.

"Yes. My uncle, Roderick Tollemache, was half-inclined to put it into the hands of the police."

"Dat would ha' been de foolishhest t'ing ter do," interrupted Bill the Brute. "We wuz on ter dat possibility, an' dey wouldn't ha' been no show fer a cop ter find out nuttin'. At de same time de kibosh would ha' been put on de information youse is gittin' now."

"Well, I persuaded my uncle to let me comply with the conditions named in the letter," resumed the girl. "I was to come here, alone, walking from a Twenty-third Street car from the corner of Tenth Avenue, bringing the money, and to wait near the lumber-yard till some one spoke to me. The person would guide me to the place."

"Sure! I wuz de man, an' I did lead youse ter de place," chuckled Bill the Brute; "and here youse are."

"Well, now, you have not told me anything that you are going to do. What do you know about Miriam Tollemache? I did not know that William would be here till I saw him. I am glad to see you, William, because, from the fact of your having been at the carriage-door when my cousin disappeared, I can easily believe that you may know something about her."

"I have only my suspicions, mum," returned Cantor, with that same oily smile of his. "But I am going to try to find the young lady. She is a very nice young lady, and she always treated me well, even though I was only a servant."

"What is all this going to lead to?" thought Nick.

"Of course, youse hez got ter stay wit' us till we git ter de end o' dis game," growled Bill the Brute. "We

are ter git ten t'ousand dollars between us ef we tell youse where de goil is, an' ten t'ousan' more when we puts de nippers on de guy ez took her away. Isn't dat de understandin'?"

"Yes. That is what the note said, and my uncle has agreed to the terms."

"Well, then. To make sure that there will be no mistake about it all, we have decided to ask you not to go home until we show you where your cousin is," added William Cantor smoothly. "It will make it so much easier. You see, the man who has Miss Miriam is a slick fellow, and—"

"You know where my cousin is, then?" broke in Grace Whitmore indignantly.

Cantor saw that he had made a mistake, but he recovered himself quickly, as he replied:

"No. But we suspect. That is all. I got a look at him as he took Miss Miriam away in that automobile, and I think I should know him if I saw him. That is all."

"Ah! Then the green automobile around the corner was concerned in this affair," muttered Nick. "I thought it was."

There was a loud bang at the outer door of the kitchen, in which Nick Carter was listening to the conversation in the parlor.

The detective had only just time to slip into a pantry and close the door partly, when William Cantor came out of the parlor and threw open the kitchen door to the yard.

An ugly old woman, whose seamed and wrinkled face told of many years of infamy, and whose clawlike fingers, as she held an old shawl together over her shoulders, accentuated the tale, came into the kitchen and carefully closed and bolted the door.

She handed an evening paper to Cantor, who took it to the lamp on the kitchen table and glanced over the flaring headlines.

The door to the parlor had been closed.

The footman looked about him anxiously, and then whispered, in a hoarse tone to the old woman, as he pointed to the parlor door:

"Mother Bennett, don't let her know anything about this."

"Of course not, deary. That would blow the whole thing. If she knew the dear, sweet young lady was dead, that would mean the loss of the twenty thousand you and my son, Bill, are to get. Trust your friend, Mother Bennett, deary. Is my boy, Bill, in there, with her?"

"Yes."

"Say, Cantor, listen," went on the hag, wriggling and shaking, as she laughed in silent fashion, while her toothless jaws wagged in sympathy with her mirth. "Wouldn't it be a good match if my son Bill, in there, was to marry that girl? What a handsome couple they would make, eh? Ha! ha! ha!"

As the hag continued to chuckle, Nick Carter, peeping from the pantry, could have strangled her with much pleasure.

Mother Bennett was the mother of Bill the Brute. He called himself William Bennett when he wrote his name formally.

"They have found the body of Miriam Tollemache, eh?" muttered Cantor. "We must not let her know."

If she saw this paper, she would say there was no use looking any farther. You understand?"

There was a world of sly meaning in the footman's voice, and the old woman winked knowingly.

"Well, William Cantor, I generally can see a hole in a ladder; can't I?" she responded.

"Of course. Now, you keep that girl here, while we go after the parties that will get us the money."

"How are you going to do it?"

"Well, it is easy enough. There is a gardener up there at Headlands—that place on the Hudson belonging to Roderick Tollémache—who will let us into the house. There is something else on hand for us while we are about it. We may as well kill two birds with one stone, you know."

"What, a job?"

"Sure. Bill knows all about it. The old woman has fifty thousand dollars' worth of jewelry in her bedroom, in one of those fake safes, made to look as if they were of iron."

"I know the kind," chuckled the hag.

"Yes, and there's solid silver in an iron-lined closet next to the dining-room which is worth another fifty thousand. It's this old-fashioned silver, that has been in the family for generations—brought over from England by some of the ancestors of the old lady."

"My?"

"Yes. Well, we shall find Miriam up there. I know all about it. We shall find the man who took her, too. It's all dead easy. I knew from the first, but I did not want to say till I saw where I was going to get my bit out of it."

"Miriam is up there?" exclaimed the old woman. "How can that be when she is dead in her father's house in New York?"

Cantor placed his hand quickly over Mother Bennett's mouth.

"Hush! Did I say Miriam was up there at Headlands? Well, that is all right. We'll call her Miriam. You have heard of two people being so much alike that you can't tell one from the other?"

Mother Bennett nodded.

"Well, there's a twin sister of Miriam's, named Rose, who always lives with her mother at Headlands. I have seen her. You know the mother and father are separated. I went up there half a dozen times with the carriage. Now, do you begin to see?"

"Cantor, you are a wonder," chuckled Mother Bennett. "Does Bill know all this?"

"Now, Mother Bennett," responded Cantor soothingly. "You know Bill. He's a good fellow, especially in a scrap. But you can't tell him everything. He will show Rose Tollémache to Miss Whitmore, the girl in the other room, and we will get the ten thousand for that. Then I'm going to show her some one who is supposed to have abducted her. That will get the other ten thousand. After that, they will find out that Miriam Tollémache is dead, and, of course, the abduction will be shown to be all a fake. But we will have the twenty thousand, and we need not care."

"But what about the man who is supposed to be the abductor? Won't they hold him?"

"No, Mother Bennett. The police will not have any say in it. They will not be told. We don't take the police into our confidence in such things. We will keep Grace Whitmore here, so that she can't blab, either."

"Where is this gardener? When are you to see him?" asked Mother Bennett.

"He will come here, to the house. He said he would be here before nine, and it is nearly that now. I have never seen him, but if a man with a heavy black beard and spectacles comes to the door and says with an English accent that he wants Mr. Williams, let him in. He will be our man."

"And you've never seen him? Has my boy, Bill, seen him?"

"No. But we cannot make a mistake. Now, I am going in to see what Miss Whitmore and Bill are talking about. Take care they don't get to see that paper."

William Cantor, who had been more or less nervous and excited all the time he was talking to Mother Bennett, went into the parlor, where he was followed a moment later by the old woman, after she had hidden the evening paper in her pocket.

No sooner had Mother Bennett entered the parlor and closed the door behind her, when Nick Carter slipped out of the pantry, and down into the cellar through the trap.

It was not more than ten minutes afterward, when a light tap came to the back door.

Mother Bennett glanced cautiously at the parlor door, ere she ran to the other door to answer the tap.

"Mr. Williams 'ere, mum?"

It was a square-shouldered man, with a black beard covering his chin and dark goggles over his eyes, who stood at the foot of the short flight of crazy wooden steps, looking into the face of Mother Bennett.

"Mrs. Williams?" she asked, pretending to misunderstand him, so that she could look her visitor over more carefully.

"'Oly crikey! Wot hare you talkin' about, mum? Hit's a cove I want—not a dame. I said Mister Williams. I didn't know as there was a missis in the 'ouse."

Mother Bennett was satisfied.

"Wait a minute. I'll call Mr. Williams," she answered, as she motioned the visitor to a chair and locked the back door.

As she disappeared into the parlor, the visitor removed the goggles for an instant, that he might make a better survey of the apartment, revealing the eyes of Nick Carter, the detective.

CHAPTER IV.

A MIDNIGHT VISIT.

"I didn't get your name," was the first remark of William Cantor, as he came into the kitchen and looked at Nick.

Nick chuckled knowingly.

"Ho! Wot's this 'ere yer givin' a bloke? Crimes an' parish! Yer knows me name well enough. You're jokin', hain't yer? Haskin' me wot me name is! Tee-hee-hee!"

William Cantor joined in the chuckling laugh of the detective—utterly unlike the sonorous tones of Nick Carter when he did indulge in one of his rare explosions of mirth—and protested:

"No, really. I don't know your name. I never heard it. All I know is that you are a gardener at the Headlands."

"His that a fact?" asked Nick, ceasing his laughter

and looking hard at Cantor through his dark spectacles. "Well, my name is James Birch, haltho'ugh they halways calls me just gardener at the 'Eadlands."

"I reckon we'll call you gardener, too—Mr. Gardener," suggested Cantor smugly.

"Wot yer like. I hain't pertickler wot yer calls me hif yer don't call me too late for dinner. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Mister Gardener" certainly seemed to enjoy a joke, no matter how thin it might be.

"How are we going to get to the Headlands?" asked Cantor. "Shall we take the train?"

"No. I've got the houtomobile—the green one, you know," responded "Mr. Gardener."

The footman looked quickly at him, but the face of the black-bearded man was quite composed, and Cantor's momentarily suspicions were allayed. He had wondered whether there was any significance about the green automobile.

"Will you excuse me for a moment while I go into the other room?" asked Cantor.

"Cert," chirped Nick.

Cantor walked swiftly into the parlor, but was not swift enough to close the door between himself and the persistent gardener, for he found the man with the dark goggles with him in the parlor as he looked toward Bill the Brute.

"This is Mr. Gardener, Bill," exclaimed Cantor. "He can take us to where Miss Miriam Tollemache has been held a prisoner. We will bring Miss Miriam here. But we must do it cautiously, because the man that took her away is a sharp fellow, and we must not let him know that we have discovered her."

Grace Whitmore looked doubtfully from William Cantor to Nick, and then glanced at Bill the Brute.

William Cantor was the most respectable-looking of the three, for Nick Carter had pulled his soft hat down in such a fashion that it looked decidedly tough, to which aspect his dark goggles and black beard contributed their full share.

As for Bill the Brute, Grace Whitmore had conceived a loathing for him that she could not overcome for an instant.

"You will have to stay here, Miss Whitmore, until morning. Mrs. Bennett, the lady who keeps this boarding-house, will give you a room adjoining her own, wherein you will be as comfortable and safe as if you were in your own home at Brooklyn."

"No; that will not do," objected Miss Whitmore promptly. "I do not care to remain here all night. I will go to my uncle's house in Fifth Avenue, if it would not be possible for me to get to Brooklyn conveniently. My father will not worry about me, because he will know that I am at my Uncle Roderick's. But I would not stay here for anything."

Bill the Brute moved threateningly, but the girl did not observe it.

"Don't be a fool, Bill," whispered Cantor in his ear. "You'll spoil it all. I'll fix it."

"Miss Whitmore, I will make you very comfortable," put in another croaking voice, as Mother Bennett sidled into the parlor and grinned affably at the girl.

It could not be said that Mrs. Bennett helped the cause much, for Grace rather shrunk from the old lady as she placed one of her skinny hands on the girl's shoulder.

The situation was becoming more and more strained,

for Miss Whitmore reiterated her intention of going home, and moved toward the door.

"Ho! Wot's hall this 'ere guff?" broke in "Mr. Gardener," as if much disgusted. "Hif the donah don't want ter stay 'ere, w'y don't you blokes let 'er go? I don't see no use hin keepin' 'er 'ere hall night."

"Thank you, sir," smiled Grace at the black goggles. "Ho! That's hall right," responded "Mr. Gardener."

"Wot I say his this 'ere: Bunkie doodle! That there means that you hought ter be halloweed ter cut yer stick. Hin hother words, slope—slope—slide—look it—hon yer way—skedaddle—skiddoo—deed-part."

"Say. Wot's all dis?" growled Bill the Brute. "Who is dis duck comin' inter dis game wit' givin' orders. I don't want ter be mekin' no trouble, but I jest want ter say ter dis Mister Gardener dat it ain't his put-in, an' dat I kin lick any butter-in dat ever come down de pike. Dat's wot!"

Bill the Brute banged his great fist upon the table so that he made everything in the parlor ring. But it did not seem to impress "Mr. Gardener," who responded with a chuckling "Tee-hee!"

William Cantor leaped into the breach to prevent an outbreak of hostilities, for he knew that Bill the Brute was quite capable of attacking the gardener in an instant if he were not placated.

What William Cantor did not know was that if Bill the Brute had tried to thrash the innocent-looking "Mr. Gardener," he would have suffered one of the greatest and most painful surprises of his life. But that is another story.

"Hold on, there, Bill," protested Cantor. "Mr. Gardener does not mean any harm, he doesn't understand, that's all. Let's go into the kitchen and talk this matter over. We'll leave Miss Whitmore here for a minute."

Bill the Brute nodded acquiescence, and they all went into the kitchen, "Mr. Gardener" being the last to leave the parlor.

He contrived to brush close to Miss Whitmore and to whisper to her in his natural tones:

"Stay here, Miss Whitmore. I am Nick Carter, the detective. I will see that you are safe."

Grace nodded, with a slight smile. She knew the voice, and, being a quick-witted young woman, she comprehended the whole situation in a flash.

William Cantor looked behind, but by that time "Mr. Gardener," was at the doorway, just coming through, as innocently as could be desired.

"Now, what are we going to do about this? We don't want to use force with her. But she's got to stay here," remarked Cantor, as the parlor door closed.

"Why can't we use force?" growled Bill the Brute. "I'd twist her neck ef youse guys 'ud let me."

"My dear Bill, that would not pay. Easy does it. We'll have our fingers on this twenty thousand dollars if you don't get too frisky."

Bill the Brute only growled.

"I think she'll listen to reason," Mother Bennett interposed. "I can persuade her."

"You!" growled Bill the Brute contemptuously.

"Yes, me," snapped his mother. "Let me try."

"That there's wot I say. Let the hold lydy try," pleaded "Mr. Gardener."

Mother Bennett did not wait for permission, but went into the parlor forthwith.

In less than a minute she came forth, with a dry smile crackling her parchment face.

"I told you I could persuade her," she croaked, in triumph. "She will go to her room right away—and I will lock the door."

Nick Carter began to see his way clear now.

"You get 'er ter 'er room, an' I'll go hafter the hauto-mobile," he suggested. "I left it a block or two haway in one o' these 'ere garages. Meet me in front of the Pennsylvania ferry-house in fifteen minutes."

Nick Carter had unbolted and unlocked the back door as he spoke, and was outside before any objection could be offered, if there had been any such intention on the part of the others.

Among the jumble of cabs in the wide space in front of the Pennsylvania Station at the foot of Twenty-third Street, Nick caught sight of his faithful assistant, Chick.

Standing near the cab, watching it furtively, but pretending not to be doing so was a well-built, keen-appearing young man, whom Nick recognized, even in the semi-darkness, as Simmons, the *Echo* reporter.

Nick walked swiftly among the cabs and contrived to whisper to Chick a short order, to which Chick nodded.

Then Nick humped into Simmons from behind in an awkward way, as if it were an accident.

Simmons turned angrily to see who was the blundering idiot who had slammed him almost under the feet of a horse.

A smile illumined his countenance as he recognized Carter, and he exclaimed triumphantly: "Ah! I thought you could not get away from me. I knew I'd find you."

"Yes. When I fall all over you," responded the detective banteringly. "But, never mind. I'll tell you what to do. I suppose you are on this Miriam Tollemache murder mystery?"

"Sure!"

"Well, I can give you something to do that may help you in getting to the bottom of it."

The reporter's eyes glistened.

"Go to the private house of Herman Gilderstein, the ribbon importer, in Lenox Avenue, and find out how much of this ribbon came into New York and what because of it."

The detective took the scrap of ribbon from his pocket-book and held it for a moment before handing it to Simmons.

"I have your promise that you will not make a picture of this ribbon for the *Echo*, or make any use of it except what I ask you—eh, Sim?" asked Nick.

"Sure, Mr. Carter. You know that you can trust me."

The detective gave the scrap of ribbon to the reporter, as he answered quietly: "I know I can, Simmons. Otherwise I would not be giving you this mission. Now, I want to know all about this ribbon. Learn what retail stores in New York bought it, and whether Gilderstein has any more of it in stock, wholesale. We must find out who bought this ribbon that was around the neck of Miriam Tollemache. When we have got that, I guess we'll know who killed Roderick Tollemache's daughter."

"When shall I see you again, Mr. Carter?"

"To-morrow morning, at nine, I will be at my rooms—E. I can. I should advise you to get all the information about that ribbon to-night. It is not yet ten o'clock, and I dare say you will find Mr. Gilderstein at home."

"In bed, perhaps," suggested Simmons, with a doubtful smile.

"Possibly," assented the detective. "Well, if he is, what would you do, as a reporter?"

"Rout him out," replied Simmons promptly, adding: "You have something in view in this case that you are going after now, haven't you?"

"Of course."

"Well, will you give it to me, for the *Echo*, to-morrow morning? The *Echo* is an evening sheet, you know, and it would come in nice for a big spread head."

"If I have any news, you shall have it, exclusively, Sim. Now, get after that ribbon."

As Simmons darted away, jubilant over the mission given to him by the famous detective, with the prospect of having a great "beat" on all the other papers, Nick walked swiftly to a garage in a quiet corner not far from the foot of Twenty-fourth Street, Chick following him in the shadows, and looking out to see that neither was shadowed by any one else.

William Cantor was a little impatient when a green automobile, with a very French-looking chauffeur—who was no other than Chick with a waxed mustache and a Vandyke beard, which, with his automobile goggles, disgraced him completely—rolled up to the front of the Pennsylvania Station, with "Mr. Gardener" inside.

"Who's dat guy?" demanded Bill the Brute, as he gazed at the French chauffeur with some disfavor.

"E's the chauffeur," explained Nick. "E belongs ter the 'Eadlands. They ain't nethin' okay about 'im but 'is face. You'll get hused ter that. Some coves might not like your face, Bill. You know, a man can't 'elp wot 'e looks like."

Bill the Brute glanced quickly and aggressively at "Mr. Gardener," but the speaker appeared so innocent, that the ruffian said nothing more, as he took his seat in the big touring-car, with "Mr. Gardener" by his side, and William Cantor facing them.

"Hi say, Halphense," cried Nick to Chick. "Put 'er haling has seen his we git out of the crowded part o' town yer know. We want ter git ter 'er 'Eadlands by midnight."

"Yes, my good man," added William Cantor, in his oily tones. "Don't be afraid to put the power on when you have a clear road. The 'Eadlands are some distance beyond Yonkers, and we shall have to hurry."

"Alphense" replied only by a grunt. It was a rule with Chick not to speak when on an expedition of this kind, without special orders from the detective.

As the automobile sped along, and at last struck the country road which is known as Broadway all the way from the Battery to Albany, Nick Carter tried to imagine what Bill the Brute would do if he should suddenly discover that he was crowded against the man whose name was a terror to crooks all over the country.

Bill the Brute lighted a cigar and smoked steadily, while William Cantor, satisfied that the scheme was working better than he could have expected, chewed gum with much enjoyment.

A strangely assorted set of men, indeed, in one vehicle!

CHAPTER V.

SLINKY PAUL.

It was pitch-dark when the automobile turned into a long avenue of elms, through an open gate, above

the tracks of the Hudson River Railroad, beyond which flowed the mighty river.

"Stop!" ordered Nick, ere they had gone far up the winding private road leading to the entrance to the mansion known as the Headlands.

The chauffeur obeyed instantly.

They could make out the outlines of the porte-cochere in front of the main doors and flight of stone steps, and a light here and there told that some of the inmates of the house were either still up or had the bad habit of sleeping with lights in their bedrooms.

"Take 'er to the back o' the 'ouse, me covey," went on the chauffeur.

Chick drove the automobile across the grass, threading the way among trees with a skill that reassured William Cantor as to his being an expert chauffeur, and brought up to a large vacant space.

"What about dogs?" whispered Bill the Brute.

"The dogs 'ave hall been fixed," replied "Mr. Gardner."

Chick made this statement at a venture, depending on the fact of his having seen in this important matter before leaving for town.

"We was out in the small window of the pantry. I observed," observed William Cantor. "That is the underground. I know just where it is. I have been here often enough for that."

"And! Wait here a moment, while Hi 'elp Hal guide the hauto to a safe place, so that we can get in a 'urry when we want it," requested "Mr. Gardner."

With Nick by his side, and the two rascals standing in the yard waiting for them, Chick drove the automobile slowly over the way it had come till he felt sure that any noise they might make would not be heard by the inmates of the house.

They stopped in a thicket and Chick, without a word, stepped down under the seat a small room, with a handkerchief tied over his face, who grunted in fear as he was pinned to the ground.

Chick Carter stepped, so that he could look into the face of the alleged prisoner, holding a small electric lamp to light a way that it lighted up the man's countenance without showing anywhere else.

"That Slinky Paul Minns," observed the detective, as he caught a glimpse of the pale face and small features. "I told you to keep out of New York six months ago. You ran back, eh? How long have you been in the house at the Headlands? H'm! You can't answer that handkerchief over your mouth, of course."

He pulled the handkerchief from Slinky Paul's mouth, and that white and livid face looked in an apologetic way.

"That's only two weeks, Mr. Carter. I wanted to be out of the house, and I was to have left, 'til the whole thing was fixed. I didn't know the main was about. You can't see that, can you? Why can't you let a guy have his own chance? Is it 't' you're not a fair shot?"

"You're not a fair shot," said Nick, and it would not be strange to say that it was Slinky Paul for ten years, for the first time.

"Dere yer goes ag'in. Bringin' up a game, and all de time. I'm gittin' a honest livin' now, and I'm all I want," protested Slinky.

"Well, Paul," observed the detective, as per-

haps he knew, for he seemed relieved when Nick Carter replaced his lamp in his pocket.

"Alphonse!"

"M'sieu!"

"Stay here, and keep Slinky Paul with you. Have you got your gun?"

"Oui, M'sieu!"

Chick produced a heavy six-shooter, a Colt .44 caliber, which gleamed wickedly before the eyes of Slinky Paul Minns.

"Take his away!"

Slinsky Paul looked as if he would protest vigorously, but a tap on the head from Chick quieted him, and in a minute he had been relieved of a revolver, a dagger, a bunch of skeleton keys and a jointed "jimmy."

"Nice jewelry to be found in the pockets of an honest young man," remarked Nick dryly.

Having left Alphonse with the automobile, in which Slinky Paul was still a prisoner, under the seat, now that his weapons and burglar tools had been taken from him, Nick made his way swiftly to the front of the house and up the main steps.

All was quiet, for the inmates depended mostly on the dogs to protect the place, and the servants had supposedly all gone to bed.

Nick used one of his skeleton keys on the front door, but, as he had expected, found it securely fastened with bolts and chains.

He must awaken some one in the house, after all.

He would not ring the bell, because that would alarm the house. Besides, he had prepared for this, as will be seen.

He knocked three times on the panel of the big door, and at the last knock the door swung open, and a clean-limbed, square-jawed, wakeful young man, in evening dress, appeared.

"Walter? Is that you?" asked Nick quietly.

"Yes, Mr. Carter. I have been here for a week, as you told me, but have not found out anything, except that no one up here knows anything about Miss Miriam being missing."

The young man might have been an upper servant, in his neat black and white costume, or he might have been a singularly alert detective.

As a matter of fact, he was the latter—one of the most valued men in the service of Nick Carter.

"Well, Walter, you must be cautious," he explained, as the door closed, they went into the closely shuttered library communicating with the main hall, which was lighted only by one large lamp, with a wide shade, on a table in the center of the room.

"I always am, Mr. Carter," was the calm response.

Nick Carter nodded approvingly, as he went on:

"Bill the Brute and William Cantor, the footman at the town house of the Tollemaches, are outside, in the backyard, waiting to break in. They are going to get Mrs. Tollemache's jewelry and the silverware."

"Are they?" asked Walter, with a dry smile.

Nick smiled, too, as he looked cautiously about him. "That is the program. But I have another one for them."

"So I supposed."

"Chick is down the drive, with an automobile, and he has got Slinky Paul Minns, tied, under the seat. Slinky was in the game."

"He has been here as a gardener. I have been waiting for orders from you before I nabbed him."

"I know. You are an efficient man."

This quiet compliment made Walter blush with pleasure. It was not the habit of the great detective to scatter praise about lavishly, so that it was valued when it did come.

"Are you going to let those men in?" asked Walter, after a short pause, during which Nick seemed to be turning something over in his mind.

"Yes. But we will keep them away from the jewelry and silverware first. They have something else in view, and I'll make them do that first. They want Miss Rose to go with them to town. Don't ask why, Walter?" he added, quickly. "It is not necessary to explain it just yet. I will be answerable for Miss Rose's safety."

Walter was about to reply, when he and Nick Carter together heard a footstep on the broad staircase and saw through the half-open door that a light from a small lamp was coming down from an upper floor.

In a second Nick put out the big lamp in the library, and listened.

The footsteps were so light that he knew they must be those of a woman, and he recognized also that the feet were covered with shoes or slippers, because they tapped sharply on the thickly carpeted stairs.

Down the stairs they came, and then toward the library.

Nick pulled Walter behind the portières which separated the library from a small room used for writing and reading in the rear.

It was a woman, dressed for riding in an automobile, for she had on a long coat, buttoned from neck to toes, and her hat was covered with a veil which was tied under her chin.

As she stood for a moment near the center table, in an uncertain attitude, the light of the lamp—a portable affair, with a handle, so that it could be carried like a candlestick—fell full upon her face.

"Great heavens!" muttered Nick inaudibly. "It is Miriam Tollemache!"

It was with difficulty that he restrained himself from rushing out and asking her what her name was before he could collect his thoughts.

Then, as he remembered that he had seen the dead form of Miriam in her father's town house in Fifth Avenue, he smiled at his own impetuosity.

He gave himself a sharp pinch on the arm, as he reproved himself, below his breath:

"Nick Carter, are you in your second childhood?"

"Rose Tollemache!" whispered Walter in his ear. "She's a dead ringer for her sister, Miriam."

"You are right, Walter," whispered Nick. "She almost persuaded me against my own knowledge for a moment."

The girl stood in the middle of the room, looking around her, and it could be seen, in the light of the lamp, that she was in such a state of excitement that she hardly knew what she was about.

Nick Carter noted how her hand shook as she placed the lamp on the table, and he saw that she staggered as she crossed the room to the large curtained window which looked over the lawn in front of the house and raised the window shade to peer out into the darkness.

What was she about to do?

This was no part of Nick Carter's program, and he hardly knew how to proceed.

The girl stood at the window for a few moments, and the slight moonlight outlined her form so that Nick could have watched her even without the lamp inside, which she had carried with her and was moving up and down in the window, evidently as a signal to some one.

Then, as Nick watched, he saw a face outside the window—a man's face.

The girl held the lamp in such a position that Nick got a good view of the features, and he started as he recognized them.

They were the features of Ferdinand Gregory, a wealthy Wall Street broker who had long been an intimate friend of the Tollemache family, and whom Roderick Tollemache often referred to as one of the brightest and most upright young men in the financial district.

It was only for an instant that he saw the face, for the window was unlatched from the inside by the girl, and then, without more ado, she stepped from the sill into Mr. Gregory's arms.

"Gee!" muttered Walter.

"Let us see where they go, Walter?"

Nick darted out of the front door and down the steps, just in time to see the couple—the young man almost carrying the girl—dash down the driveway and into the thicket, where the green automobile was waiting in charge of Chick, with the professional thief, Slinky Paul Minns, hidden under the seat.

Nick kept in the shadow of the trees, as he slipped down to see what would be the outcome.

Gregory ran over to the automobile, where Chick was sitting in the front seat, his hands on the driving-wheel and his foot on the brake, ready to move when he should get orders from the detective.

"Quick!" exclaimed Ferdinand Gregory, as he helped the girl into the back seat, and sat beside her. "Drive quick, to the Grand Central Depot," he added to Chick.

Dressed in chauffeur's livery, with goggles and cap pulled down over his forehead, Chick looked like any other automobile-driver.

This did not explain why the eloping couple had deliberately got aboard an automobile that did not belong to them, taking into their confidence a chauffeur they never had seen before.

But the detective understood it all, as, slipping through the trees, to get where Chick could see him, he came across another automobile, which, in the darkness, looked exactly like his own machine, with a chauffeur, whom no one, in the gloom, could have distinguished from Chick, sitting patiently at the wheel.

They had made a mistake in their automobile, that was all.

"Of course, they did not expect to find another auto waiting around here, and they took the first one they saw," he muttered.

He had contrived to show himself momentarily to Chick, and that faithful adherent, under pretense of having to look at the machinery of his automobile, darted into the shadow of the trees and whispered to the detective:

"What shall I do?"

"Where do they want to go?"

"Grand Central Depot."

"Take them and find out where they are going, sure," whispered the detective. "Now, get back. Be at my room at nine in the morning. I will run the other case."

"All right, F. respected Chick."

"What's the reason, chicken?" Nick heard the gangster say in a whispering tone.

"All right now, sir," returned Chick briskly, as he slipped into his seat and took the auto spinning down the road and out of the big gates.

Nick hurried to the back yard, where he found Bill the Brute fuming with rage and impatience, and the young William Cantor doing his best to quiet him.

"Wot's dis here waitin' fer?" demanded Bill the Brute, pushing forward. "Look here, Mr. Gardener, I—"

He got no farther. The mild-looking Mr. Gardener caught the burly ruffian by the elbow and twisted him round with as much ease as he would have handled a small boy.

Bill the Brute's surprise was so great that it was comical.

"See, cull, dat's a solid grip youse hez in yer mitts. Who's Who's he t'ought it wuz in youse?"

"Hush, coves 'ave said that," was the simple response of "Mr. Gardener," his Cockney accent more marked than ever.

"Keep quiet, Bill," commanded William Cantor, assuming an authoritative tone unusual to him, now that he found he had a strong-handed companion in the person of the supposed mild "Mr. Gardener."

Bill the Brute raised his right hand threateningly, but a little tap on the shoulder from "Mr. Gardener" warned him to keep quiet, and he subsided immediately. "Is everything all right?" asked Cantor.

"I think so," returned Nick. "We go him hin the front way. I 'ave fixed hit with the 'ead footman, Walter. He'll be here, waitin' for us."

"How can get Miss Rose to go with us, you say?" went on Cantor.

"He told you that there before," answered Nick, at a moment because he did not know what the real gardener, in that place he was taking, had said.

It seemed to be all right, however, for Cantor chuckled as he asked what they were to do first.

He had been thinking about this, and had partly formed a plan of action.

He wanted to find out how much these men knew of the doings of Miriam Tollmache, and he hoped to surprise them into a confession when they found that Rose was not there.

He wanted to play a bold game, in the hope of getting something from Cantor before he knew that Rose had been taken.

"Look here, with him, for a few minutes," he whispered to Nick. "When you see that back door open inner door, get him come hin. Hunderstand?"

"All right," Nick began to see him about five minutes.

He slipped into the house by the back door, which was unlocked and fastened instantly.

"All right, ready for her part, Walter?" he asked the footman.

"She is in the library."

"All right."

Nick Carter and Walter Doty entered the library, where they found a neat and intelligent-looking girl in the dress of a maid, who was waiting for them.

Nick and Walter stepped with her into the little back room; where Nick talked earnestly to her for nearly ten minutes.

At the end of that time she slipped quietly up-stairs, while Nick went to the back door and threw it open, as a signal for the two burglars and rascals generally that they could come forward.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BURGLARY.

Nick Carter and Walter Doty led the way quietly to the kitchen, and through it to the dining-room, which was in front, communicating with the kitchen by a short hallway.

Back of an iron-lined door in the middle of this hallway, if they could get through it, they would find a closet, filled with massive silver.

Nick told the two burglars to wait in the kitchen for a moment while he opened the silver closet.

Walter went with him.

The door opened easily, for it was not locked, Nick having arranged that in advance.

"Is this stuff all right, Walter?" whispered Nick.

"Yes. It's only tinware, worth about five dollars a ton, or thereabouts. The real silver is in the safe deposit vault in New York. Mr. Tollmache had it taken there six months ago, on the quiet."

"Well, what about it?" growled Bill the Brute, suddenly appearing with a bull's-eye lantern.

"Hit's hall right," responded Nick. "Hi'll keep watch with this 'ere cove, while you hand the hother bloke gits the bloomin' swag. 'Ave yer got a bag?"

"Two on 'em," returned Bill the Brute, showing two sacks which had been in the automobile, and which he had brought with him into the house.

"Hall right. 'Urry yerself. We'll give yer notice hif we 'ears hany one," whispered Nick hoarsely, as he and Walter Doty retired into the darkness.

"Now, Walter, what about Fifi? Is she nearly ready?"

"I will go and see. I told her to be in the little room adjoining Mrs. Tollmache's bedroom. It is shut off from the bedroom, and there is no fear of disturbing Mrs. Tollmache. Fifi always takes care of that. She is Mrs. Tollmache's own maid, you see."

"I know," observed Nick Carter quietly.

"When these fellows have got through with their job down here—gathering up that fake silver—Ha! ha! ha!—we'll take them up-stairs, and see what they know about Miriam."

A rattling of metal in the iron-lined closet suggested that Bill the Brute and William Cantor were bringing their booty out, in bags.

It was not exactly "tinware," as Walter Doty had called it, but it was a very cheap article of plated nickel, which would pass for silver, if it were not examined closely. The real silver was in a safe deposit vault, as had been observed by the detective's assistant.

"Wot shall we do wit' dis here stuff?" asked Bill the Brute, as they stood at the outer door in the back of the house.

"Put the bloomin' swag hin a corner hof the yard,"

surprised Nick. "We'll git hit bag'in arter we've landed the bold woman's jewels."

Acting on this advice, Bill the Brute carried the two boxes to the outer darkness and deposited them in a corner, while William Cantor asked Nick how they were to get to the safe wherein were the jewels that represented another \$50,000, in addition to that which they had secured in the shape of the silverware.

"I'll show you," answered Nick shortly. "We'll find Rose Tollemache there. She has had a letter telling her that Grace Whitmore will have something important to tell her about Miriam, and she is ready to go away with us. That will enable you and Bill to get the persons for producing Miriam. You can put her in the automobile, and then reach for the shiners in the safe."

"You don't always talk like a Cockney, Mr. Gardener," remarked William Cantor suspiciously.

"Ho! That's nothin'," hastily rejoined Nick. "I'm always a-tryin' ter git hower that, an' sometimes, when I'm slow an' careful, I kin 'it a pace fer ten minutes when yer wouldn't know that I hever wuz in dear ol' London, don't yer know?"

Cantor nodded, but Nick saw that he was not satisfied.

The fact was that Nick occasionally forgot his Whitechapel dialect when much interested in what he was saying, and that was the explanation of his lapse just then.

It would be bad if Cantor became convinced that "Mr. Gardener" was not exactly what he assumed to be, for the ex-footman who had turned out to be a notorious thief and burglar was not without brains.

Nothing more was said about Nick's dialect, and in another two minutes Nick Carter was leading Bill the Brute and William Cantor up a flight of back stairs to the bedroom where Nick had told them they would see Rose Tollemache.

"That's Miram," muttered Cantor, as he stepped inside the room with a suave smile, leaving Bill the Brute outside in the shadows.

She had a thin veil down, but her figure and dress were those of Rose.

It was now considered wise to let Rose see Bill in the house, for his general appearance was a little too rough to be reassuring.

"You can tell me something about my dear sister, Miriam," asked Fifi anxiously.

"Yes, miss. We will take you to where Miss Whitmore is waiting for you, and I think then you will know all about her."

"Is she safe?"

"Of course, miss. Safe and well. She will be glad to see you."

"All!" warned Nick, in an earnest whisper. "Walter and Miss Rose down to the hautomobile. Hi will follow with this gentleman."

Had Fifi really been Rose Tollemache, she probably would have wondered why the supposed gardener and the man she had never noticed before, William Cantor, the ex-footman, should remain in the room even a minute after herself.

As it was, knowing that she as well as Nick Carter and Walter Dug, were only playing parts in a farce—which might become a tragedy, however—she was

willing enough to go down, with the understanding that the men were close on her heels.

As soon as Walter and Fifi were outside, Bill the Brute came out of his concealment and looked inquiringly at Nick.

"Wot's de t'ing ter do now?" he growled. "Dis stunt hez too many frills about it fer me."

"Why?" ventured Cantor suavely.

"Well, de t'ing is right here. Ef we's goin' ter git all dis loot, wort' a hundred t'ousand altergedder, wot's de use o' bodderin' 'bout dis here little twenty t'ousan' fer showin' dis dame ter de udder one, an' den gi'in' away dat guy wot youse calls Ferd'nand Gregory? Dat's wot's bitin' me. Dey's nuttin' ter it."

Nick Carter found it difficult to keep his hands off the burly Bill, but he restrained himself, as he replied, in his broadest Whitechapel:

"Ho! I say, you gives me the 'ump, Bill. I like ter see a bloke go on with anything 'e 'as begun, an' not be halways chasin' an' an' changin' 'is mind like. Look 'ere, Bill. Hit hain't halways heasy ter turn silver and diamonds inter coin right away. This 'ere bloomin' twenty thousan' dollars is goin' ter be halmighty 'andy, 'cause we'll hall 'ave some ready cash huntill we kin melt down the silver. Don't you hunderstand?"

"Dat's right, too," returned Bill, grumblingly acknowledging the wisdom of the supposed gardener. "Douse de glim, William."

Cantor put out the lamp on the center table which had afforded the only illumination of the room, and Billy brought his bull's-eye lantern into play, throwing its light around the room in uncanny flashes of white.

"Kin we git right inter de old woman's room, William?" asked Bill, in a hoarse whisper.

"I'll show yer," interposed Nick. "The safe is hon the hother side o' the bed. But she sleeps hawful sound, an' it won't be 'ard ter git at the safe, 'specially ez it hain't very strong. Hit's hall a fake about hit bein' a safe. Why, yer could blow a 'ole in the bloomin' thing, especially with the kind o' breath you 'ave, Bill."

It is not to be supposed that the detective intended to allow these rascals to go into the bedroom of Mrs. Tollemache, neither was there any jewelry in the safe. He meant to let them go as far as they would without doing damage, for the fulfillment of a purpose of his own, all tending toward the discovery of the murderer of Miriam Tollemache. He felt that he was on the right trail now, and he believed he would soon be able to lay his hand on the man who had killed her.

Bill the Brute and Cantor had no more chance of stealing Mrs. Tollemache's jewelry than they had of carrying away the whole mansion on their backs.

What Cantor had to do with the disappearance and subsequent murder of Miriam he did not know. Perhaps nothing. But there was no doubt that the ex-footman

was a thief and the consort of thieves, and that he was working a neat little conspiracy to get twenty thousand dollars out of Roderick Tollemache by pretending to find Miriam and show her to Grace Whitmore.

It would be easy for Grace to learn that the supposed Miriam was really her twin sister, when once they got into conversation, but Carter had a scheme for preventing the revelation until he and his pals should have received the money they had demanded for their information.

Nick went to the apartment opening into the bedroom and softly touched the handle. Then he slipped back to Bill the Brute and whispered: "It's locked. I shall 'ave to use these."

He exhibited to Bill the Brute the skeleton keys he had taken away from Slinky Paul Minns, and immediately rose in Bill's estimation, while William Cantor's half-suspicious, which had troubled him shortly before, were allayed almost entirely.

"Say, you ain't so slow, Gardener," whispered Bill admiringly. "Git de door open an' den we kin git inter de safe on de run. Say, dis t'ing is a cinch."

"Hof course," agreed Nick.

"Dead easy," added Cantor.

"Sure!" responded Nick.

The two burglars felt that they were getting to the end of a profitable night's work, with the supposed Miriam in their auto, and all this swag falling right into their hands.

Bill the Brute had visions of a long visit to Europe, such as he had always wanted to take, because he believed he would find it much easier to fool the police there than at home.

William Cantor was playing so deep a game, that it is not easy to surmise what his ideas of enjoyment were.

Nick stole to the door again, and pretended to be working at the lock with a skeleton-key, as Bill the Brute turned the light of his bull's-eye on the keyhole.

Nick was sparring for time.

"Wot's de matter wif' youse?" grumbled Bill huskily. "Let me come ter dat. Gee! I c'u'd git dat door open while youse is lookin' at it."

"Ush!" warned Nick.

"Wot's de good o' hushin'? De ol' woman's asleep an' dey, an' dey ain't no one else in de room. Dat's wot youse told us."

"I know. That's right, too," answered Nick.

"Well, den, git busy. Open dat door, or else let me come."

"You couldn't work this 'ere lock, I tell yer. Hilt's harder than de safe lock," snapped Nick, as if he were out of patience.

Bill the Brute clenched one of his ponderous fists, but he did not do what he would have liked—punch Nick's head. There were two reasons against it. One

was that a fracas just then would have alarmed the house, and the other that he had had experience with the supposed gardener's strength, and he was not sure that he—Bill—would get the better of a fistic argument.

Nick had peeped over his shoulder, and now he saw that his time had come for action.

He stepped back from the door and arose to his feet, as he whispered to Bill the Brute, as well as to Cantor, who had stepped up behind him:

"Keep still a moment. I'll hopen de bloomin' door and then you and Bill can crack the safe while I wait hout 'ere to keep watch."

"All right!" whispered Cantor.

"Don't be long," warned Nick. "Git wot you hare hafter quick, and then make a bolt for de hautomobile. Walter is down there, with de donah, Miss Miriam—or Miss Rose, an' we kin git haway with all de swag hafone hany one wakes up hin de 'ouse. It's hall as simple as a glass of 'ari-an'-'ari."

"Git out o' de way," commanded Bill roughly. "Hopen dat door!"

The room was in solid darkness save for the shaft of white light from Bill's lantern which made a circle on the door leading to Mrs. Tollemache's room.

Nick stepped back for a moment.

Then, noiselessly and swiftly, the door opened, and, as Bill the Brute raised his lantern, the circle of white light fell full upon a white-robed figure and then illuminated the face as with a halo!

It was the face of Miriam Tollemache!

CHAPTER VII.

A BATTLE IN THE DARK.

For a few moments, Nick, as well as the two rascals who were about to break into Mrs. Tollemache's bedroom, were paralyzed with astonishment.

Nick knew that Rose Tollemache had eloped with Ferdinand Gregory in the green automobile, and that Fifi, who had represented Rose, for the benefit of Bill the Brute and William Cantor, was in the other auto.

Yet here was a girl who was either Rose or Miriam Tollemache.

Nick Carter was accustomed to quick thinking, in arriving at deductions, and those deductions usually proved to be correct.

It did not take him long to explain to himself what this strange apparition meant.

Rose Tollemache had weakened when she found herself fairly on her way from home, and had refused to elope, after all.

Of course, that was the explanation.

William Cantor and Bill the Brute, on the other hand, had no explanation to offer to themselves, except that this was the ghost of Miriam Tollemache, since they fully

believed that Rose was in the automobile below, waiting for them to take her to Grace Whitmore.

William Cantor was aware that the supposed Miriam below was Rose, her twin sister, but Bill the Brute did not know even that. He had long been told that Miriam was dead, and, for all he knew, it might be the real Miriam they were going to show to Grace Whitmore.

As William Cantor, the much more intelligent rascal of the two, had remarked to Bill's mother, Mother Bennett, it was not safe to trust Bill with too much knowledge.

Of course, the situation revealed when this mysterious girl stood in the doorway, looking into the glare of light from Bill's bull's-eye, could not last.

All the girl could see was the blinding glare from the bull's-eye, making everything else black to her.

She saw the light moving about, and then there came the crashing of men's feet, as they scuffled wildly about the room.

With a muffled cry which sounded decidedly human, in spite of her mysterious aspect, the girl in the white robe retreated to the bedroom and shut the door with a sharp slam, which told of locks and bolts shooting into place.

"Down with him, Chick!" whispered Nick's voice, in the natural tone, and without a vestige of Cockney dialect.

"All right, sir!"

Chick was wrestling with William Cantor in the darkness, while Nick himself seized Bill the Brute, and with a stroke of his powerful wrist, forced the ruffian to the floor.

There was little talking.

The surprise had been complete for Bill the Brute and William Cantor, aside from that of the apparition of the girl in the bedroom.

That was merely a coincidence.

Nick's purpose had been to get these men into the bedroom, so that they could be taken in the very act of burglary.

He might have seized them down-stairs, perhaps, but that would not have been so effective as now, when the treasure was already in their possession, and when they were actually endeavoring to get into the bedroom of the wealthy elderly lady, in the dead of night.

Moreover, he meant to charge William Cantor with a crime which was of more serious character than even burglary.

It was all over in a few moments.

Nick had Bill the Brute lying flat upon his back, with the detective's knee in his chest, while Chick had overpowered Cantor, and was holding him firmly against the wall with one hand, while, with the other, he turned up the lamp on the table, which had not been completely extinguished.

As the light went up, Nick saw that Cantor was shaking so violently that he could not stand except with the aid of Chick's strong hand.

"William Cantor, who killed Miriam Tollemache?" demanded Nick solemnly.

"I—I don't know, Mr. Gardener," stammered Cantor. "She—she—isn't dead. There—she was, in the doorway. You—you—you saw her!"

"Miriam Tollemache is dead," replied Nick, in awesome tones. "I saw her dead body."

"Yes—yes—yes! That is true, too. But—but—who was that we saw—just—now? That—was Miriam Tollemache! I—I—I—ought to know her. I—I—I—have been near her often enough. And yet—and yet—she's dead!"

Nick Carter had been holding down Bill the Brute with comparative ease, for the detective's marvelous strength enabled him to perform muscular feats which would have been impossible to ordinary men.

Bill the Brute had never ceased to struggle, but Nick merely gave him a push now and then, as a hint to him to keep still, and then Bill would subside temporarily.

The white-robed girl who had appeared in the doorway did not come out again, neither were there any sounds to be distinguished in the bedroom, to indicate movements by its occupants.

William Cantor seemed about to collapse altogether, when suddenly a blow descended upon the back of Nick's head that made him drop like a log.

Had such a thump been dealt to any one of ninety-nine men out of a hundred, probably it would have rendered him entirely senseless.

But Nick Carter was blessed with a vitality not easily disturbed. Besides, he had on a thick wig as part of his disguise, as well as a heavy stiff hat. These, together with his own naturally thick hair, helped to deaden the blow, which had been dealt with vicious force by a man who followed it with another across the forehead of Chick.

It was all so sudden and rapid, that Nick only had time to see that the assailant was swinging a heavy, short club, secured by a leather thong to go around the wrist, which is colloquially known as a "billy," and that the man swinging it was Slinky Paul Minns, when the light went out, and he got a kick under the chin which would perhaps have disabled him had it not happened to be a slanting blow, and heard the sound of men's footsteps on the steps.

Then all was silent.

Nick Carter had been dazed by the crash on the back of his head with the loaded "billy," and it was perhaps a quarter of a minute before he had pulled himself together so that he could light the lamp and look around him.

The first object that met his eyes was Chick, lying at full length on the carpet, unconscious.

The blow across his forehead had been more effective than that dealt to Nick Carter, and Chick was temporarily in No Man's Land.

Nick Carter, still in his disguise as Birch, the gardener, soon restored his assistant, with the aid of a portable medical outfit in the form of a leather pocketbook which he always carried for emergencies.

"Well, Mr. Carter, they have got away," remarked the voice of Walter Doty in his ear.

"Did they take the silverware?"

"No. They did not take anything except themselves."

"In the auto?"

"No. I had that away, and I had taken charge of the car—silverware, too. Here's Fifi."

"How did Slinky Paul get here?" asked Nick.

"He must have slipped out of the automobile before I got to the railroad depot," put in Chick, who was just emerging from his daze to a knowledge of things surrounding him.

"The Grand Central?"

"No, no! I ain't had time to get back all the way from New York. I left Ferdinand Gregory and Miss Rose at Yonkers. There was a train going to New York which stopped there. He suggested that they could get to the Grand Central by that train, without making me go down to the city with the auto."

"So they went on the train?" asked Nick.

"Yes."

"With the intention of taking the western express at the Grand Central?"

Chick rubbed his chin with a reflective air, as he answered slowly:

"Well, now, Nick, there was something queer about that. The girl, for some reason, had made up her mind to leave Mr. Gregory as soon as she should reach New York."

"Ah!"

"Yes. I heard them arguing just before they got on the train. I did not hear the beginning of the dispute, but the girl gave it out cold that she would go straight to that swell hotel near the Grand Central. You know the one."

Nick Carter nodded.

"Yes. She is well known there, because she often went with her father and mother before they separated, and, of course, she would have no difficulty in procuring apartments, even at that late hour of night."

Nick had a way of settling matters in his own mind as he went on.

"Then you brought the auto back—our auto?"

"Yes. The other one is near it, in the shrubbery at the back of the house," answered Chick.

Fifi had been listening to this conversation in silence.

"Good night, gentlemen," she said quietly.

Before Nick could ask her any questions, she had tapped at the door of the bedroom in a certain way that conveyed a signal evidently understood by the occupants, for the door was thrown open at once.

Fifi vanished, and the door was closed quickly and fastened.

Nick Carter whistled softly.

"Mystery! But I will get to the bottom of it later," he muttered. "The thing to do is to get Grace Whitmore out of that den in Twenty-fourth Street. After that, I think I can squeeze out of William Cantor what he knows. I am convinced that he holds the key to the mystery. Miriam's body was found, with all her jewelry gone. She was a high-spirited girl, and she would surely resist any attempt to rob her. She had on a diamond necklace worth \$20,000! What became of that? It would tempt the cupidity of such a fellow as this footman! Yes, yes! I think the clouds are rolling away."

"Take that automobile back to the garage from which it came. You will find it on Thirty-eighth Street," directed Nick, speaking to his faithful Chick. "Incidentally, you might keep your eyes open for Gregory, and try to find out why the elopement fell down so suddenly."

"All right, Mr. Carter," answered Chick, as, finding that his head was pretty nearly all right, he went toward the door.

"Chick!" called Nick.

"Yes."

"Be at my rooms at nine in the morning."

"Yes."

Chick started again, but stopped.

"You'll be there, Mr. Carter?"

Nick smiled.

"I'll try."

"That's all you can be expected to do. Good night!"

"Good night, Chick."

Nick turned to Walter Doty.

"Stay here for the present."

"All right."

"Try to unravel the mystery of that girl we saw just now."

"Who?"

"That's what I want to know, Walter," rejoined Nick, somewhat impatiently. "I don't know who she is. I only know that she came to that door and went in again, and that she looked like either Rose or Miriam Tolle-mache."

"I'll try to find out, sir."

"Good! You will hear from me inside of twenty-four hours. And, oh! by the way, Walter, if you see any ribbon about the house of this pattern, let me know who has it."

He showed Walter a scrap of the ribbon which he had

parated from that he had given to Simmons, the previous, the night before—for it was morning now.

"I can tell you right now," declared Walter Doty positively. "I saw a little bit of that ribbon in Fif's prayer-book for a book-mark. She is a religious girl, and she reads her prayer-book every day. I can get the book for you at once."

He went to a table in a corner of the boudoir and brought forward a well-worn prayer-book, between the leaves of which was a bit of the ribbon of peculiar pattern which had been tied about the neck of the dead Miriam.

Nick took the crimson ribbon and placed it in his pocketbook with the other scrap he had been carrying.

The detective knew already that only one bit of this ribbon had been sold at retail, for he had traced it from Herman Gilderstein to the retail store which had obtained a single bolt of it, and from which they had sold only a few yards in one piece before the bolt was recalled and the whole stock of ribbon destroyed.

The ribbon had not been up to the standard of the production of the factory which had made it, and it had been withdrawn from sale, rather than that it should be allowed to interfere with the high reputation the manufacturers maintained for their products.

Nick Carter had felt from the first that the ribbon would help him to a solution of the mystery. That was the reason he had sent Simmons over practically the same ground he himself had covered.

Nick gave one more warning to Walter to be careful, and then went out of the house, on his way to the automobile secreted among the trees.

He found the automobile ready for use, just as Chick had left it, with no one in sight.

"Now for Mother Bennett and Grace Whitmore," muttered Nick, as he took his place in the chauffeur's seat and started the machine for town.

Nick Carter was a proficient chauffeur—having found that he must be at home in driving a car if he meant to keep up with the times—and he took the auto bowling along the road toward the lights of New York with the feeling of exhilaration which makes automobiling such a fascinating recreation.

"I wonder where those rascals are?" he said, aloud, as his thoughts ran away with him. "I never thought that miserable sneaking crook, Slinky Paul Minns, would get away. He was the gardener who was to have led Bill the Brute and Mr. Cantor—smug Mr. Cantor!—to Headlands. Well, I shall meet Slinky Paul some time or other, I hope. I wish I knew where he is now."

If Nick Carter had turned very swiftly, he might possibly have caught a glimpse of Slinky Paul.

That amiable and cunning individual was hanging to the back of the automobile, grinning as he listened to the detective's audible conjectures and intentions.

"'Ow easy it 'ud be ter split his 'ead open with a stone," thought Slinky Paul. "I'd do it if I dared!"

But Slinky Paul was a coward, as well as an incorrigible criminal, and he had not the nerve to touch the detective, even with all conditions in his favor.

It was this terrorism exerted by Nick Carter over crooks everywhere which made him the great detective and avenger he was.

CHAPTER VIII.

MAINLY PUGILISTIC.

As Nick Carter drove his automobile into the crowd of vehicles always waiting about the Pennsylvania ferry-station at the foot of West Twenty-third Street, he merely nodded to a man who was standing by the side of another automobile, and then darted across the street in the direction of the old shanty in which Mother Bennett kept her boarding-house.

All was quiet about the place, as Nick got into the yard.

He looked at the shuttered windows, but all of them were as blind as the night itself.

Nick took out his pocket electric lamp and studied the ground for footmarks.

That did not help him, because, although he saw plenty of indications in the grass and dust of persons having been about, he could not tell how long ago they had been there, and he remembered that he had walked about considerably himself the night before.

Indeed, many of the footmarks he could trace he knew were his own.

"I suppose Grace Whitmore and Mother Bennett are asleep," he reflected. "It will be just as well for me to get Miss Whitmore out of this house as soon as I can, before Bill and Cantor come back from the country."

He smiled as he thought of the way those rascals had been fooled, and then he went to the front door and boldly pulled the bell, which he knew rang in the upstairs hall.

Hardly had he withdrawn his hand from the bell-handle when the door opened, and Mother Bennett, in a long dark robe, appeared.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

Nick had thrown off his disguise, and was just the clean-faced, determined-looking man that we know him.

He did not reply to the old woman, but pushed his way in. He was not in a mood to be held back any longer by Mother Bennett or any of her gang.

"Where are you going, you impudent critter?" demanded the old woman, in a fury. "Here! Bill!"

Nick smiled at this bluff.

"It is no use, Mother Bennett! Your precious son Bill is far enough away. I am coming in to see Miss Whitmore."

Suddenly he was pushed aside by some one with such force that he staggered against Mother Bennett.

At the same moment, Grace Whitmore, fully dressed, stepped into the front parlor, in which he had been talking to Mother Bennett—for the front door opened directly into the parlor—and gazed wildly at the person who had pushed Nick aside.

After one glance at Grace Whitmore, Nick swung around to see who it was that had come into collision with him so rudely.

It was a woman!

For the moment he could not believe his eyes, as he had her up and down, although the veil she wore prevented his making out her features in the dim light of a turned-down lamp.

Grace Whitmore had her woman's intuition to help her—er, perhaps, it should be said her feminine habit of jumping to conclusions.

At all events, she came rushing through the room, her arms outspread, to embrace the veiled intruder.

Nick Carter had half a suspicion.

It became knowledge when the woman threw back her veil and showed the features of—whom?

"Miriam!" screamed Grace Whitmore.

"Heine! Dat's wot I told youse, Miss Whitmore," roared the coarse voice of Bill the Brute, as he entered the room behind, followed by William Cantor and Slinky Paul Minns.

Nick Carter saw that he was in for it now.

He knew that he could not expect to get out of this house with Grace Whitmore and this erratic Rose Tollenache without some difficulty, if at all.

The great detective was prompt to act when necessity arose, and he leaped into the battle which had been thrust upon him so suddenly with a fierce pleasure in the odds against him.

It was characteristic of Nick Carter that he never fought as well and so confidently as when he found himself opposed by several men, under conditions which gave him the advantage, as the latter side.

A master of the science of boxing, Nick did not allow himself to become flustered, and it was with amused contempt that he blocked three rapid, but clumsy, blows from Bill the Brute.

Bill depending on his strength entirely when compelled to use nature's weapons—and, somehow, Bill was without the gloves and knifes that he carried usually.

"Stand back there, Billy!" cried Nick, as he sent a straight right and left full into Bill's chin, jarring him so that, if he had been half the giant he was, he surely would have been down and out.

As it was, he fell against William Cantor, who was coming on, his young face twisted by an ugly leer, to fight his skill against that of the detective.

Nick Carter found that William Cantor—for all that he was so much smaller in every way than Bill the Brute—was a foe to be reckoned with.

William had learned to box under the guidance of a clever middle-weight champion, and he could handle his "fives" with almost as much dexterity as Nick Carter himself.

The two girls were clinging together in one corner of the room, while Mother Bennett was snarling and yelping angrily as she tried to take a hand in the mêlée.

Cantor side-stepped, feinted, and danced about on his toes in the approved pugilistic style, and Nick smiled as he saw that there was a chance for him to bring his own skill into play.

He skipped about as lightly and swiftly as William Cantor, and for a few seconds it was nothing more than shadow-fighting.

Then Cantor, covering up his chin with his right elbow, shot out a left that landed on the detective's forehead with such precision that it rocked his head backward.

Cantor chuckled aloud.

Nick uttered a sympathetic laugh, for he was too broad-minded a man not to give even a dirty thief like Cantor credit for a good bit of work, even when it meant discomfiture to himself.

But this temporary triumph of Cantor proved to be his undoing.

Having pushed back Nick's head with his right, he followed it up with lefts and rights swiftly and viciously, which missed fire altogether or were calmly blocked by the agile detective.

Bill the Brute had sunk into a chair, a little out of the zone of battle, and was trying to collect his ideas.

He was out of the fuss for the time being.

Slinky Paul Minns snarled at Nick, and would have liked to take a hand if he could have found a way to do so without risking his own precious carcass too much.

For a short space of time, Nick allowed William Cantor to hammer away at his fortresslike defense, only watching curiously to see how well the footman did his work, without being able to land a really punishing blow.

"Durn your picture! I know you, Nick Carter! You think you can fight," panted William Cantor, for the pace was beginning to tell on him. "Well, I can do something in that line myself. Look out for me! I'm coming, and coming right swift!"

Nick Carter laughed carelessly. He knew the old game of pugilists of trying to "rattle" opponents by abusing and badgering them, and was not to be disturbed by that kind of a thing.

Cantor batted away at the detective's solid arms and elbows, but could not get to his mark.

It did not last long—only just until Nick could get his bearings.

Suddenly, as Cantor left an opening, in his eagerness to get to his opponent's chin, the right fist of the detective darted forward, aimed unerringly at Cantor's jaw.

But it did not land.

At that instant Slinky Paul Minns found a way to interfere.

He had picked up a light chair—the only one in the room, for the others were all of the old-fashioned, heavy, upholstered pattern—and now thrust it between Nick and Cantor at the exact moment that the detective was sending in what would have been a finishing blow.

Slinky could not have done it better had he calculated his time and distance to a nicety.

But he had not done anything of the kind.

With a blind determination to help his partner somehow, he had seized the chair and dived into the row, hoping that it would help out somehow.

The fact that it came in just when it did was good luck for him, and he could not have done it again if he had tried a hundred times.

Nick's fist hit one of the rungs of the chair, and, as he followed the first blow with a second, the chair was crumpled up between him and Cantor, giving the footman a chance to get from under.

In a moment the three men and Mother Bennett were on top of Nick Carter trying to pound the life out of him.

"Kill him! We've nach'ally got ter kill him!" belated Bill the Brute, who had recovered from the effects of the knock-out blows to take a hand in the attack.

"Yes! We must kill him!" agreed Cantor.

"Of course. Dey ain't nuttin' else ter do, by swipes!" squeaked Slinky Paul, as he seized one of the broken rungs of the chair and tried to get a fair stroke at Nick's head.

But the detective had too much strength to be overcome even by such odds as this.

He struggled and squirmed, and soon had Bill the Brute down, so that he could give him his quietus.

Nick did not hesitate about doing it, either.

He bestowed a couple of uppercuts on Bill's jaw that put him to sleep for good.

Then he threw off the other two men and the old woman. He hesitated as to whether he should bestow a settling kick on William Cantor, but decided that it was not worth while.

He was glad of it, too, because brutality was one of the characteristics of primitive man that Nick hated with all the fervor of a truly brave man.

As he found himself free, he looked around for Grace Whimmore and Ruth Tollenache.

They had disappeared!

It was easy enough to see how it happened, for the front door was open, and the cold morning wind was blowing through refreshingly after the excitement of the fracas in which Nick had just borne such a lively part.

He rushed to the door and looked out.

No one was in sight in the yard, and he made his way to the street with equal lack of result.

For a moment Nick pondered.

"Mr. Carter!"

It was the voice of Chick, in his ear.

"Hello, Chick! Have you put the automobile away?"

"Yes. The other one that you took down to the P. R. R. station over there, is close by."

"Good! I saw you at the station as I pulled up awhile ago. Did you notice Slinky Paul Minns anywhere about?"

"Sure! He was hanging on the back of the auto when you came up. I thought you knew it."

"I did not know it, Chick, or I would have interviewed my dear friend, Mr. Minns, then, and it might have saved me a little trouble afterward."

Chick would have liked to ask what trouble, but he was so accustomed to keeping his mouth shut unless Nick asked him to open it, that he said nothing.

"Take me over to the Manhattan Hotel, in Forty-second Street, Chick."

"All right!" responded Chick, going toward the automobile.

"Stay!"

"Yes?"

"See whether anyone is in that house I have just left."

Chick obeyed without hesitation. He was in the habit of doing what he was told unquestioningly.

"I shall want Cantor to explain a few things," mused Nick, as he walked over to the auto and waited for Chick. "As for Slinky Paul and Bill the Brute, I can get them any time. I——"

He caught sight of a man slipping along by the high fence of the woodyard, and in a flash the detective had him by the throat.

"Not yet, but soon, Cantor," whispered the detective banteringly. "I want you for a little while."

"What for? What right have you to attack an inoffensive citizen on the public street?"

"At three o'clock in the morning," added Nick. "What are you doing out at this time?"

"What are you out for?" retorted Cantor.

"I have business," replied Nick, as he dragged Cantor toward the automobile, in spite of the struggles of the erstwhile footman.

"So have I, Mr. Carter. I am neither drunk nor disorderly, and I am not a thief. This is an outrage on an American citizen, and——"

"Well pass that by," interrupted Nick coolly. "You were in Mother Bennett's joint just now, and you are charged with abduction. Will that give you enough reason for my taking possession of you now? It will have to, I am inclined to believe."

"The one in there except the old woman," whispered Click to the detective, suddenly coming to the surface out of the darkness. "She was mad, but I made her show me all over the house, cellar and all."

"Never mind, Click. There is one of them. He will fit between us. You take the wheel and I will be the passenger. Go to the hotel first."

"Look here, Mr. Carter, this is something that will cost you more than you think," blurted Cantor. "I protest."

"And after we have been to the hotel, Click," cautioned Nick calmly, "we will go to police headquarters. I understand?"

"O.K.," answered Click, as he sent the automobile spinning across town.

CHAPTER IX.

TRAILING THE GREEN AUTO.

Nick Carter was sleeping comfortably at his apartment the next morning when a ring came from the office below, announcing that some one was after him already.

"That's all right," remarked Nick, as he answered the telephone call, and directed that Mr. Simmons be sent up.

"Well, Simmons?" was the detective's greeting, as the headquarters reporter of the *Evening Echo* stepped into the parlor and carefully fastened the door.

"The only person who bought that crimson ribbon was Miss Miriam Tollemache. I found Gilderstein, the importer. He told me that he had sold only one bolt of it, to the retail firm of Jones and Mortley, the swell ribbon and lace goods millinery fittings and such like—well, I'll answer."

"I know that. They were only the exclusive set, and they know every customer they have, and what each one is worth," laughed Nick. "Go on."

"I found old Mortley out of bed. Jones has been dead for two years. Mortley was madder than a drunken trooper when he woke up, but I didn't care for his rage. Theaters have to get used to that. He came down to his dressing, and after awhile, when I told him what I wanted to know, he came down off his perch and became confidential. You see, the old man is interested in that I killed a murder, and when he told me that Miss Miriam was the only person who ever laid any of that ribbon, he wondered whether that would prove a clue to the murderer."

"I think it will," remarked Nick.

"I don't see it myself, Mr. Carter. But there is the fact, as I got it. You know who bought the ribbon. But as the ribbon was known to belong to Miss Miriam, it is only natural that she should have bought it."

"Perhaps so," responded Nick musingly, as if his thoughts were somewhere else.

Nick Carter dressed himself in silence. He was working on a problem.

He strolled across to the front window, pondering, and glanced out carelessly, hardly seeing the panorama of vehicles and people.

Suddenly, with a short exclamation, Nick darted to the door and rushed down the stairs.

"Thunder! What's struck him?" muttered the reporter, going to the window. He saw Nick Carter jump into a cab, which apparently had been waiting for him in case he should desire to use it, and the cab dash away, evidently pursuing a green automobile, which was bowling up the street to the very limit of speed allowed by law, if not a little beyond.

In the automobile was a young man, well dressed, who was crouching down by the side of the chauffeur, as if he wished to keep out of general view.

"I don't see why he did not wear goggles and the other automobile fixings, if he wanted to hide himself," thought Simmons. "Gee! This is a nice position for me—in charge of Nick Carter's rooms, without a word of explanation. I wish I knew what to do."

Simmons was a philosophical sort of young man, and he determined to make himself at home if he had to wait, so he helped himself to a cigar, and sat comfortably in Nick's own chair, to read the morning papers which had been in the room for two hours, at least.

Nick kept behind the green automobile in his cab, until the auto stopped at the residence of Roderick Tollemache, and the young man got out.

He was Ferdinand Gregory.

Nick waited until he saw Gregory go up the steps and obtain admission to the house, and then he followed.

Roderick Tollemache was in the library, and Gregory was talking to him earnestly.

Nick Carter was so well known to all the servants of the Tollemache mansion that he was admitted without question, and allowed to go where he would.

"All right, Parker. I will go into the backroom," he remarked, in a low tone, as he stepped through a doorway, communicating with the library by a curtained arch.

"Very well, Mr. Carter," answered the solemn head servant, in black. "It is Mr. Tollemache's orders for you to do whatever you like."

Gregory was talking in quick, nervous tones.

"And so, Mr. Tollemache," he was saying, "we determined to run away. I came to New York with her,

when she changed her mind, and I do not know where she is."

Roderick Tollemache gazed at the young man as if he would kill him.

"You mean to say, Ferdinand Gregory, that, with one of my daughters lying dead, up-stairs, you have deliberately robbed me of the other?"

"No, Mr. Tollemache. But Rose and I both knew that you never would give your consent to our marriage, and therefore we could do nothing else."

"You did not ask me?"

"I knew it would be useless."

Roderick Tollemache walked up and down for a minute or two, his two hands clasped over his agonized face.

"Yes, yes. I know. I had other plans for Rose. I wanted a title in my family, and I expected to get it through her. Fool! Fool! I was a fool!" he groaned.

"Am I to understand that you will give your consent now, when I find Rose?"

"Find her," returned Roderick Tollemache passionately. "Then— Well, we'll see."

Ferdinand Gregory strode over to the banker and grasped his hand fervently, as he declared, with a catch in his breath that he could not control:

"I will find her, Mr. Tollemache, and what is more, I will find out the meaning of that awful mystery up-stairs."

"My Miriam? No; I shall never know," murmured the banker brokenly, as Ferdinand rushed from the room.

Ferdinand had only reached the hall, when a powerful hand clasped his wrist, and he was pulled into the shadow of a statue of Mercury of heroic size which stood near the door of the rear room.

It was Nick Carter's hand, and it was Nick Carter's voice that whispered sternly:

"Where did you get that crimson ribbon, with your initials worked into it, Mr. Gregory?"

Nick held in his hand the dirty but which Ferdinand Gregory had carelessly flung upon a table in the hall, and which Nick had picked up immediately afterward, and across the inside of the crown of which was a ribbon of the peculiar pattern, which had now become so familiar to the detective.

"Why do you ask, Carter?" demanded Gregory angrily.

"Because I want to know."

"I will not tell you."

"Why?"

"Because I do not choose."

In a flash a pair of glittering handcuffs had come from one of the inside pockets of the detective's coat, and Nick showed that he could clap them on the wrists of the young man if he cared to do so, for the detective's iron-grip was irresistible.

"Don't make a scene, Mr. Gregory," whispered Nick. "I do not want to put these on your wrists, but you must answer my question."

"This is ridiculous. Are you in your senses, Carter?"

"Are you in yours?"

The metallic tones of the detective indicated that he would not stand any nonsense, and at last Gregory, in a sullen voice, replied: "Miriam Tollemache gave it to me. She had rather more of it than she wanted for the sash or whatever it was, that she bought it for, and she embroidered the hat-ribbon for me with her own hands."

"I supposed so."

"Why?"

But Nick Carter did not answer immediately. At last he asked, as if it were a matter of very small moment:

"Did she wear the sash up to the time she disappeared, two weeks ago?"

"How should I know?"

"Did she?"

The detective was determined to probe to the bottom all of Ferdinand Gregory's information, and the young man saw that he must answer.

"She did not. She did not like the ribbon when she had it made into a sash, and she would not wear it."

"H'm!"

That agreed with the information Nick Carter had obtained already.

"What did she do with it?" he asked, after a pause.

The young man laughed uneasily.

"Really, this seems a strange line of questioning, Mr. Carter, even if you do honor me by suspecting me of killing Miriam Tollemache."

"Perhaps it is strange, but I want to know. For that matter, I will tell you now that you are suspected of being the murderer of Miss Tollemache. What did she do with the sash when she discarded it?"

Ferdinand Gregory looked about him as if seeking a way to escape, ere he answered falteringly:

"Well, she threw it down in the drawing-room one evening, when I was present, in a petulant way, and I picked it up."

"And kept it?"

"No. I said that I would use it to decorate her portrait which I have in my library, and she made a playful snatch at it."

"But you did not let her have it?"

"I did not."

"What became of it?"

"I don't know."

"Will you step up-stairs with me, Mr. Gregory?" asked the detective, in a quiet tone, that gave no suggestion of the rather stormy interview just passed.

Nick waved his hand to the stairs, as a hint to Gregory

to go first, while the solemn servants glanced at them stonily, and then followed the young man up the broad staircase to the room on the third story, where lay the body of the girl.

The door was closed, and a maid, who was going past at that moment, informed Nick that the undertakers had told everybody to keep out and not to hang about the door.

"They said they would bring the casket this afternoon, and that no one was to enter the room till it came, too," added the girl. "I don't suppose that applied to you, Mr. Carter."

"I don't suppose it did," replied the detective. "I will go in and see the undertakers. Do as they direct, however, and keep away from the outside of the door."

"Very well, Mr. Carter," answered the girl, as she tripped away.

"I do not understand what the undertakers should be there for," thought Nick, as he opened the door of the death-chamber and stepped inside, with Gregory by his side.

The room was dark.

"How stifling these flowers smell," whispered Ferdinand Gregory, in awe-stricken tones.

The heaps of lilies and white roses about the bier could be dimly made out in the gloom.

There was no living being in the room except themselves, and Nick went to a door on the opposite side, opening on a hallway, which led to a private staircase, by which the street could be reached without going down the grand stairway in front to the Fifth Avenue entrance to the mansion.

This is a common arrangement in large houses in New York, and Nick was familiar with this one, having used it several times when engaged with Mr. Tollemache in hunting down the gang of safe-breakers some years before.

"It leads direct to the side street," observed Nick quietly, as he opened the door and closed it again.

He was startled by a low cry from Ferdinand Gregory.

The young man was looking at the center of the heaped-up blossoms, and Nick supposed that the cry was one of sadness at seeing so fair a girl thus cut off from the life she must have enjoyed so well.

"What is it, Mr. Gregory?"

"Look, Carter. Look!"

The detective stepped over to the white-shrouded couch, with its setting of white blossoms, and almost eluded himself.

The dead girl was not there!

Instantly the detective examined the bier and flowers.

He saw that some of the flowers and wings which had been crumpled under the body were slowly recovering their true proper shape, and he knew that it had been

removed only a short time—perhaps only a minute or two.

"Come with me, Ferdinand Gregory, and don't try to run away, or I will shoot you dead, as an escaping prisoner!" whispered the detective, in tense tones.

He sprang to the door leading to the side entrance and rushed down the stairs two at a time.

He stopped at the bottom of the staircase and picked up a crushed lily.

"Proof positive that the body of Miriam Tollemache has been stolen, and that it came down this way," muttered Nick. "The motive is plain. It is to prevent our discovering the murderer. Can it be possible that this man by my side was concerned in this last ghastly outrage?"

Nick glanced at Ferdinand Gregory, but the young man's face was in the shadow, and nothing was revealed there.

The side door, while well fastened inside, was not guarded by servants, like that facing Fifth Avenue, and Nick went out without any one noticing him.

No sooner was he on the stone steps outside, than he saw something which made him clench his fists—a habit he had when excited.

The green automobile, in which Ferdinand Gregory had come to the house, was making its way down the street, across town, as fast as it could, in the face of obstacles, for it had run into a mass of tangled vehicles two blocks away.

"Run!" ordered Nick briefly, as he dashed down the street at the top of his speed.

Gregory followed him, but could not keep up with the agile detective, who soon outdistanced the young man by a hundred yards, at least.

The tangle of carts, wagons, and street-cars was broken just as Nick came to the end of the block, not more than a dozen yards from the automobile.

He could see that there were two men in the car besides the chauffeur, and it was evident that they were anxious to get away from the neighborhood as rapidly as possible.

The chauffeur was some little time getting the ponderous machine under way, and that gave Nick the opportunity he wanted.

With a few bounding leaps, Nick had covered the space between himself and the green automobile, and grasped the back of the machine.

It made a sudden spurt forward, but could not shake off the detective, who was there to stay.

The three men had not noticed the detective.

As for Nick Carter, he was looking, in horror, at a large bundle, in white silk, wrapped about in a large fur robe, which lay in the bottom of the tonneau, behind the three men huddled together in the front seat.

"It is the body of Miriam Tollemache!" he gasped.

CHAPTER X.

WHICH WAS THE MURDERER?

Nick Carter did not trouble himself because he had left Ferdinand Gregory behind. The discovery that the man in the green automobile were committing such an act of desecration made all other considerations seem of little moment.

He could not see whom the men were, for while the chauffeur was disguised completely by the hideous goggles and cap of his calling, the other two wore soft hats, with very broad brims pulled down over their faces, which, in combination with the turned-up collars of their overcoats, concealed them almost entirely.

Nick hung on behind the auto, as it crossed Third Avenue, and went down toward the East River, through one of the streets in which tenements and factories of various kinds alternate, until a large lumber-yard was reached.

He did not notice a young man sprinting along behind him, or he would have recognized him as Simmons, the *Echo* reporter.

Into the open gate whirled the auto, and then, a few moments later, out of another, into a private yard, which was screened from outside view by the walls of a rickety brick stable on two sides, while the other two sides were bounded by a board fence not less than fifteen feet in height.

Nick leaped down from the car and hid behind it as the three men, including the chauffeur, lifted the inanimate bundle from the tonneau and carried it into the stable.

Simmons was screened by some lumber, watching, but with no opportunity of speaking to the detective, even if he had wanted to do so.

Nick slipped in behind the rascals, his pistol ready to his hand, for he felt that he might need it before he got through with this adventure.

The stable had long been disused for its original purpose, and appeared to be a sort of storage warehouse, for all kinds of queer articles and packages were scattered about.

Nick had noticed, too, that the lumber yard was not doing business now, for there was little timber in it, and what there was had evidently been exposed to the weather for years, so that it would be hardly salable, even if it were put on the market.

The door of the stable was closed, after the automobile had been run inside, and then one of the men lighted a lantern which he seemed to know where to find in a corner of the big place.

It threw a sickly gleam about the place, as the three men stood gazing at each other across the pitiful bundle of white silk and blanketing, lying in the middle of the floor.

"Dey's one t'ing sartin," growled one of the men—much the larger of the three—as he dragged a bottle from an old soap-box and prepared to drink from it. "We can't git dis out o' de way afore night. We'll hev ter camp down in dis joint most all day."

Nick, who had found a hiding-place behind some piled-up barrels, which enabled him to see what was going on through the interstices, started as the big man began to speak, for he recognized the voice at once.

Bill the Brute!

There was no doubt about the identity of the ruffian, and Nick was convinced that the other individual in a large hat and overcoat must be Slinky Bill Minns.

This conviction was verified when the smaller man spoke.

"Aw! Quite yer squealin', won't youse, Bill?" he protested, in high, thin tones.

Bill the Brute turned savagely upon the speaker, but thought better of his first intention to strike Slinky, evidently, as he took a long swig at the bottle.

The chauffeur, without a word, took the bottle away from Bill the Brute and smashed it against the ground savagely.

Bill the Brute jumped up, and his ponderous fists were clenched, as if he were going to annihilate the chauffeur.

But the man in the goggles, whose features were effectually hidden by them and his drawn-down cap, had a revolver under the nose of the burly ruffian in a flash.

"Oh, well! Dat's all right. I s'pose dis ain't a good time ter git a souse on, on'y it gits me wot we's goin' ter do wit' ourseves if we hev ter stay here till night. I wuzn't framin' up no sech notion ez dis when I told youse I'd he'p ter git dis t'ing out o' sight," grumbled Bill.

The chauffeur did not speak, contenting himself with pointing to the automobile.

Bill the Brute, still growling, climbed into the front seat of the car and composed himself for a nap.

"Dey's one t'ing youse wants ter recollect," he burst out, as if the sense of his wrongs was too much for him. "an' dat's dis: We fell down in dat job up de river, at Tollenmache's, an' we fell down on de udder t'ing wot wuz ter give us twenty t'ousan' ef we wuz able ter prodooce dat goil ter Miss-er—wot's her name? Whitmore. We lost de goil an' we didn't find de guy wot took her away, an' we ain't got nuttin'—not a measly cent—ter show fer all de woik an' risk we's took dis last night. Now here's dis t'ing fer youse. De on'y t'ing we hez is your promise dat youse'll give us five hundred apiece ef we pull it off safe."

"We're goin' ter pull it off safe, Bill. Stick a pin in dat," interrupted Slinky Paul.

"Well, dat's all right. All we got ter do is ter put some o' dem heavy iron chains on her, an' dump her in

de middle o' de East River f'um a boat, ef we kin dodge de river perlice. I know dat. But s'pose we gits cotched! Dat will mean I go up de river fer anudder five years, unless dey try ter say dat I killed dis dame. Den dey'll put me in de 'lectric chair, an' I'll be all ter de corpse mese'll!"

Bill the Brute did not say anything more after this, feeling that he could not make his case any stronger, no matter what he might add. He just dropped asleep, where he lay in the automobile, the whisky he had consumed doing its full share toward his somnolence, no doubt.

It was now that Simmons slipped away to dash up to the Tollemache mansion.

Nick Carter was satisfied that he had come to the solution of part of the problem which had been puzzling him.

He had found out the murderer of the girl, although he had not yet seen his face.

This chauffeur of the green automobile was the man, and he doubted not that he was the leader of an organized band of thieves, for the stable was evidently a storehouse for stolen property, as well as a retreat for the crooks when hard pressed.

Nick had not noticed a policeman all the way down, but apparently the tracks of the rascals were so well concealed that the authorities had not found out the character of the place in this deserted lumber-yard.

One block away was the avenue along which automobiles often drove when making their way to the Thirty-Fourth Street ferry from up-town, and it was not unusual for autos to come down this particular street before they swung around the corner to go to the ferry.

Even if they had passed two or three policemen, there was nothing in the aspect of the automobile to awaken suspicion, except, possibly, the spectacle of Nick hanging on behind, and even that was not so very extraordinary. For men often rode at the back of autos in that way, for one reason and another.

"There is one thing," thought Nick. "It shows that Ferdinand Gregory is not guilty of this crime, but I should like to know what he has done with Rose Tollemache, or why she left him. Neither she nor Miss Whitmore were at the hotel, where I expected to find her."

Nick was thinking hard.

There had been so much mystery at the Headlands that he could not unravel at the time, that he wanted to get at that almost as much as the murder of Miriam Tollemache.

The chauffeur knelt by the side of the body of the girl, and removing the covering of her face, looked long and earnestly at the features.

He touched the crimson ribbon which was still around her neck, and shook his head.

"Was 'er de girl?" asked Slinky Paul? "Dey ain't no one lookin' at a thing like dat. De best t'ing is ter git

de chains on it, an' den put it out o' sight, in case a cop happens ter tek a notion ter come rubberin' in here. I'll git dem fer youse."

Slinky Paul Minns went to a distant corner of the stable, where barrels like those concealing the detective were piled up, and brought several feet of heavy chain, with a lot of thick string and some thicker rope.

"Dat's de stuff!" he chuckled. "Youse on'y got ter tie dis chain ter her wit' de string, an' den put de rope aroun' de hull bundle, an' dey won't be no fear of her ever comin' ter de top o' de water ag'in—'thout we wuz ter be seed. In dat case dey'd use dem drag-hooks. Well, dey ain't goin' ter pipe us off, I kin tell youse dose."

Slinky Paul Minns was talking more to himself than to the chauffeur, who was bending over the body of the girl silently, and who may have been grieving over his work, for all that Nick could tell.

"I wonder who he is," muttered Nick. "Well, it does not matter much. We shall soon find out. By heaven! It may be that he is the chauffeur in the employ of Ferdinand Gregory, after all. It is not clear yet that Gregory did not commit this crime, although I cannot see the motive. Twenty thousand dollars? No; I cannot believe that. Gregory may be on the wrong side of the market and be hard up. You cannot tell about Wall Street men. But I cannot believe that he would do such an awful thing for money. It doesn't seem reasonable. And yet——"

The detective made up his mind to act, and at once.

"Nothing can be gained by waiting," he told himself. "I will settle it now."

Like a ghost he glided from the shelter of the barrels, and, knocking Slinky Paul Minns senseless with the barrel of his heavy revolver, he pointed the pistol at the chauffeur's head, with the stern command: "Hands up!"

Instead of complying, the chauffeur stooped suddenly and thrust his head between Nick's knees.

Had the detective been less firm on his feet, he must have gone over headlong.

As it was, he tightened his knees on either side of the chauffeur's head, and pinched it so that he howled in pain.

Something in the tones sounded familiar.

Stooping, he seized the chauffeur by the back of his neck and dragged him out by main strength.

It is doubtful if there was another man in New York who could have done what Nick did now, for he brought the fellow out from between his knees with no other hold on him than his one hand grasping the neck, and swung him clear.

Then he lifted the chauffeur from the ground, and, with the steady, precise rythm of a pendulum, swung him backward and forward until he dashed him to the ground.

The chauffeur was not unconscious, but he was out of breath, and he did not move until Nick lifted him to a sitting posture with one hand, and with the other snatched away his goggles, cap, and a false beard.

The chauffeur was William Cantor!

For a few moments neither spoke.

Then the detective, keeping his six-shooter leveled at the head of the former footman, whose usually smug face was wrinkled into lines of deadly fear, thundered:

"So you murdered Miriam Tollemache!"

William Cantor's jaws moved stiffly, but he did not speak.

He was too frightened to articulate.

"You miserable whelp!" went on the detective.

Still Cantor made no rejoinder.

"You may as well make a full confession, William Cantor," continued Nick Carter. "Nothing can save you now. I have men close at hand, who will take charge of your two accomplices when they come to their senses, and, as for you, I will take you to police headquarters in the automobile belonging to Ferdinand Gregory, which you have brought to this den."

William Cantor gained his voice, with an effort, but it sounded hollow and strained, as he blurted out:

"I did not kill Miriam Tollemache."

"Perhaps not. It may have been another hand that actually killed her—choked her to death, for that was the cause of her death—but you were an accomplice. If there is any one else connected with it, we shall find him. In fact, I think I have him already."

The chauffeur was looking past the detective at something or someone behind him.

Nick jumped to the other side of Cantor, so that he could look at the door, without turning his back to his prisoner.

Ferdinand Gregory entered.

There was a meaning look between Cantor and the young man which did not escape the detective.

"Come in, Mr. Gregory. I want to speak to you. This man, Cantor, was one of the three ruffians who brought the remains of Miss Tollemache here, and who intended to hide evidence of their crime in the East River to-night. What do you know about the crime, Mr. Gregory?"

"Nothing."

Nick Carter tossed his head in scornful impatience.

"Why not be candid, Mr. Gregory? I have the net around you, as well as about this scoundrel."

At this moment somebody—a young woman—swept past Gregory and faced Nick Carter.

"No, Mr. Carter! Mr. Gregory did not kill Miriam Tollemache!" she cried, so loudly, that she disturbed Bill the brute in his drunken stupor, causing him to stir slightly.

"Rose Tollemache!" exclaimed the detective, in surprise. "Where have you been since last night?"

CHAPTER XI.

THE HEART OF THE MYSTERY.

"I have been looking for my sister," replied the girl.

"Have you not heard?" asked Nick Carter quietly.

"What?"

The detective stood silent. How could he tell this fair young woman, who seemed to believe that her sister was alive, that the body of Miriam Tollemache lay within a few feet of her, weighted with iron chains, ready to be thrown into the dark waters roaring just beyond?

William Cantor made a sudden move toward the door.

The detective caught him in his iron grip and swung him backward.

The next moment a pair of handcuffs were over his wrists and snapped, and then the fellow was lifted clear of the ground and bundled into the automobile.

"Watch him, Chick!" ordered the detective.

Chick had entered unobserved by any one except the wonderful man who seemed to have eyes in the back of his head.

"All right, Nick."

"Kill him if he tries to escape."

"All right."

"I tell you I did not murder Miriam Tollemache," screamed William Cantor mysterically.

"Chick!" warned Nick.

Chick took Cantor by the shoulder and gave him a shake which seemed as if it would dislocate his collar-bone.

Cantor subsided.

"Now, Mr. Carter," broke in Ferdinand Gregory, with more spirit than he had shown since he had seen the place where the girl lay in the up-stairs room. "What does this mean?"

Nick Carter glanced at him coldly.

"I thought I had explained to you," he answered, in metallic tones. "Miss Miriam Tollemache was choked to death and her body thrown into the East River. This man Cantor was found with the body, trying to hide it again, so that there should be difficulty in proving a case against the murderer. He has practically confessed that you know something about the crime. He brought the body in your green automobile. This is your machine, is it not?"

The detective pointed to the green automobile, on which the daylight was streaming from the open door.

Rose did not seem to be disturbed by Nick's awful revelation.

Ferdinand Gregory looked at the number on the back and examined the machine all over.

"Yes. This is my car, but I do not know how it came here. I left it at a garage near the Pennsylvania Depot, at the foot of Twenty-third Street."

"Yet this man, Cantor, had it."

"Cantor? Oh, yes. I see it now. He often used

to act as chauffeur for me before he left the employ of Mr. Tollemache, and they knew him at the garage."

"Well?"

"All he had to do was to go there and say he wanted the machine for me and they would give it to him. That is the explanation. I did not know anything about the use that might be made of it."

"I hope, for your sake, that this will prove to be the truth, Mr. Gregory. Meanwhile, I shall have to take you into custody on a charge of murdering Miss Miriam Tollemache."

There was a shriek from the girl, as she threw herself into Ferdinand's arms.

"Be calm, Rose. Everything will come out all right," pleaded Ferdinand, with an appealing look at Nick Carter.

"Tell him, Ferdinand!" cried the girl, weeping.

"I cannot."

"Why not?" asked the detective.

"There are reasons," replied Ferdinand still.

"When your own life is at stake, I should think all reasons would give way," observed the detective.

"You do not understand."

"You are right. I certainly do not. I hear Miss Rose asking you to tell all, and you refuse. It looks like a clear case to me. I am sorry for Miss Rose in one way, and glad in another."

"What do you mean?" demanded Rose indignantly.

"I mean that you have probably had a narrow escape. I know that you and Mr. Gregory have intended to get married; that you left Headlands last night, intending to take a train from the Grand Central Station; that you did not go, and that your father, Mr. Roderick Tollemache, believes that Mr. Gregory is responsible for your disappearance."

"I have not disappeared. I am here."

"I am glad you are. That will relieve your father's mind in one way. I shall be able to give him the poor comfort of knowing that the desecration intended with regard to your poor sister, Miriam, has been prevented, even though we could not bring her back to life."

"I do not know what you intend to convey," returned the girl, with a puzzled look.

"I mean that your sister Miriam's body was actually stolen from your father's house, and would have been disposed of so that even the poor satisfaction of giving her a decent burial would have been prevented."

The girl was silent. Nick could see that a fierce mental struggle was taking place within.

A fearful thought took possession of him.

Could it be possible that this girl—the sweetly married young lady—could have had some part in the murder of her sister?

The mere supposition was repellant, but the detective had come across many strange things in his career, and

he was never very much surprised at any extraordinary discovery in crime.

The dead girl had had \$20,000 worth of jewels when she disappeared. She had gone away in this green automobile, the property of Ferdinand Gregory, Rose's lover. Rose might have wanted the jewels so much that she was willing to do anything to get them. The jewels were the personal property of Miriam, and Nick had learned already, from the servants, that there was some little jealous feeling on the part of Rose with reference to the diamonds. Could it not be possible that—

The detective strode up and down in perplexity.

He must get at the truth.

Stopping suddenly, he faced Rose Tollemache, and asked her, in sharp, stern tones:

"What do you know about the murder of Miriam?"

The girl threw up her head in indignation.

Either she was innocent or a consummate actress.

Which?

"I do not know anything about the murder of Miriam, Mr. Carter," she replied. "Nor does Mr. Gregory."

"Speak for yourself," rejoined the detective curtly.

"I am speaking for myself," she answered. "And for Mr. Gregory, because I know."

There was the flicker of a smile on Nick Carter's stern countenance, as he retorted:

"You know? That is what I have been asking you."

"I meant I know that Mr. Gregory did not kill Miriam."

"Can you prove that?"

"I think so."

"How?"

"By me!" came, in ringing tones, from some one who had just stepped, unobserved, into the stable.

Nick Carter, for once, was startled out of his ordinary equanimity, and clung to the automobile for support.

The newcomer was a young girl, so much alike Rose Tollemache that she might have been her reflection in a full-length mirror.

Face, hair, figure, height, even the way she tossed her head—all were those of Rose Tollemache.

"Miriam!" screamed Rose, as she clasped the girl to her arms.

It was Miriam Tollemache!

Nick Carter bounded over to where the dead girl lay, under her blanket, with the white silken robe about her.

As he uncovered the bruised face, he looked from her to the pale, but unhurt features of Miriam Tollemache!

"What does it mean?" gasped Nick.

A yell of mingled terror and remorse from the automobile drew all attention to William Cantor, who was standing up in the machine, struggling with Chick.

"It's all up, Mr. Carter!" screamed the former footman. His face white as chalk and his whole frame shaking as if with palsy. "I did it! I did it! I killed her!"

That is not Miriam Tollemache lying there! It is—it is—"

"Well?" broke in Nick Carter fiercely. "Who is this dead girl?"

"She is Lizette Stone! She was my sweetheart!"

"My maid!" cried Miriam, in horror.

"Yes, Mr. Carter," went on William Cantor, the words tumbling over each other, in his feverish haste to make a full confession. "Lizette took Miss Miriam's jewelry. After she had got the diamonds, she wanted to give them back. I would not let her. Ferdinand Gregory suspected, but he did not dare say anything, or I would have quered his elopement. We had a quarrel. And then—I did not mean to do it, but she was obstinate, and somehow my hold on her throat was tighter than I meant, and—and—she died. I did it all myself. Mr. Gregory did not know! No one knew!"

The cowering wretch sank back into the automobile, in a dejected heap, as Chick forced him down into the seat.

"I hope you are satisfied now that I am not a murderer, Mr. Carter," put in Ferdinand Gregory coldly.

"And the jewels?" demanded Nick of Cantor, ignoring Ferdinand's remark.

"I have them, in a belt, around my waist, under my clothes."

It took Nick Carter two minutes to get at the belt, unclasp and bring it forth.

It was a leather contrivance, with three pockets of leather, fastened by buckles.

In the three pockets were the diamonds that had been stolen, and which Miriam recognized with a glad cry.

As Nick put the belt in one of his pockets, intending to return them to Miriam in the presence of her father, another automobile swung into the yard, and Roderick Tollemache jumped out.

It is hardly necessary to tell in detail of how the father clapped to his bosom the girl he had supposed was dead, but of whose presence in the stable he had been advised by Simmons of the *Evening Echo*, and who was with Mr. Tollemache in his automobile, still all eagerness on behalf of his paper.

Miriam Tollemache told how she had been to Nick's apartments, had found Simmons there, and had informed him that she had come down from Headlands to relieve her father's mind.

She had found only just before of the reported finding of her own body, she said.

She had got Simmons to go to the mansion to find out whether Nick was there, because she was afraid to go to her father so suddenly, under the circumstances, and wanted the detective to break the news.

Simmons had learned from one of the solemn servants—who heard more than they admitted, as a rule—that Chick and Gregory had gone in pursuit.

How Simmons, the reporter, followed the automobile, after being at the Tollemache mansion, we already know. Rushing from the lonely stable, he went back to Fifth Avenue, found Mr. Tollemache, told him hastily that there was news of his daughter's murderer to be had in a certain place on the East Side, and directed the millionaire's chauffeur which way to go.

Simmons was a police reporter, and it was his business not only to know every crook dive in New York, but the shortest road to get there.

It was Simmons who had engaged a cab for Miriam and privately directed the driver—who happened to be an old friend of the reporter's—to get to the stable in a hurry.

As Simmons rode along in the automobile, he discreetly broke to the banker the information that his daughter, Miriam, was not dead, adding that they would find her in the care of Nick Carter, in all probability.

"But why did you allow yourself to be suspected even for a moment of the murder of this unfortunate girl?" asked Nick Carter, after explanations had been made all around.

"Because I knew that I could prove my innocence of any such crime, and also because I did not want to admit that I had had any understanding with that wretch, Cantor," replied Gregory.

"Then you had some understanding, eh?"

"Yes, Mr. Tollemache did not approve of my suit for the hand of his daughter, Rose, and I determined to run away with her. Miriam agreed to help us, and, because she did not wish it to be known just where she was, she slipped away, with the connivance of Cantor, into my automobile, which was in waiting just down the side street on that afternoon."

"It led to a lot of trouble," observed Nick.

"I know it did," rejoined Gregory. "But we did not realize that till last night. As for this man, Cantor, I knew he was making love to the girl, Lizette Stone, and I helped him with a sum of money with which he was to prepare for his wedding, on condition that he assisted me in my plans by pretending that he did not know where Miriam had gone or when. He closed his eyes when she ran over to my automobile that afternoon. Her cousin, Miss Whitmore, never knew which way she went."

"It would have been better had she known," observed Mr. Tollemache. "I would rather have given my consent twenty times to the marriage than to go through all I have since I lost Miriam."

"And now you have found her, father," whispered Miriam, her arms stealing around the millionaire's neck, "won't you forgive them?"

For a minute or two Mr. Tollemache looked from one to the other of his daughters. Then he half-smiled, and they knew it meant consent.

"You know, father, I might have eloped and been married before this, if I had not heard that you were nearly heartbroken because you thought Miriam was dead. Ferdinand had seen it in the papers, but, as he knew Miriam was not the girl who was dead, he did not care so very much. He told me enough about it just as we were getting on a train in Yonkers, on our way to the Grand Central."

"Yes, and that stopped the elopement, for Rose would not hear of anything but going to you immediately," added Ferdinand Gregory.

"I should think so. I knew I was sure of you, sooner or later, and I felt that my first duty just then was to my father, to set his mind at rest," said Rose. "Then, I found how everything was mixed up, and I was afraid to tell all I knew to Mr. Carter. So was Ferdinand, because he held himself partly to blame for the poor girl's murder, on account of having helped William Cantor."

"Well, it is all right now," interposed Simmons, with a smile. "Mr. Carter, I should like photographs of everybody, to publish in the *Echo*, to illustrate my story of all this. I shall treat it a romance in real life. That

does not sound original, exactly, but it will describe it, all right."

Rose and Ferdinand were married in due time, with the banker's full consent.

It is pleasing to record that both parents were at the wedding—a swell affair in one of the fashionable churches of New York—and that they became reconciled permanently on that occasion.

Bill the Brute and Slinky Paul Minns took another trip up the river to Sing Sing for their attempted abduction and swindling, to say nothing of their burglarious performances at Headlands.

William Cantor died in the electric chair.

As for Nick Carter, he always maintains that he never had a more puzzling case on his hands than this twin mystery, while Roderick Tollemache insists that no one but the wonderful detective ever could have got to the bottom of The Secret of the Green Automobile.

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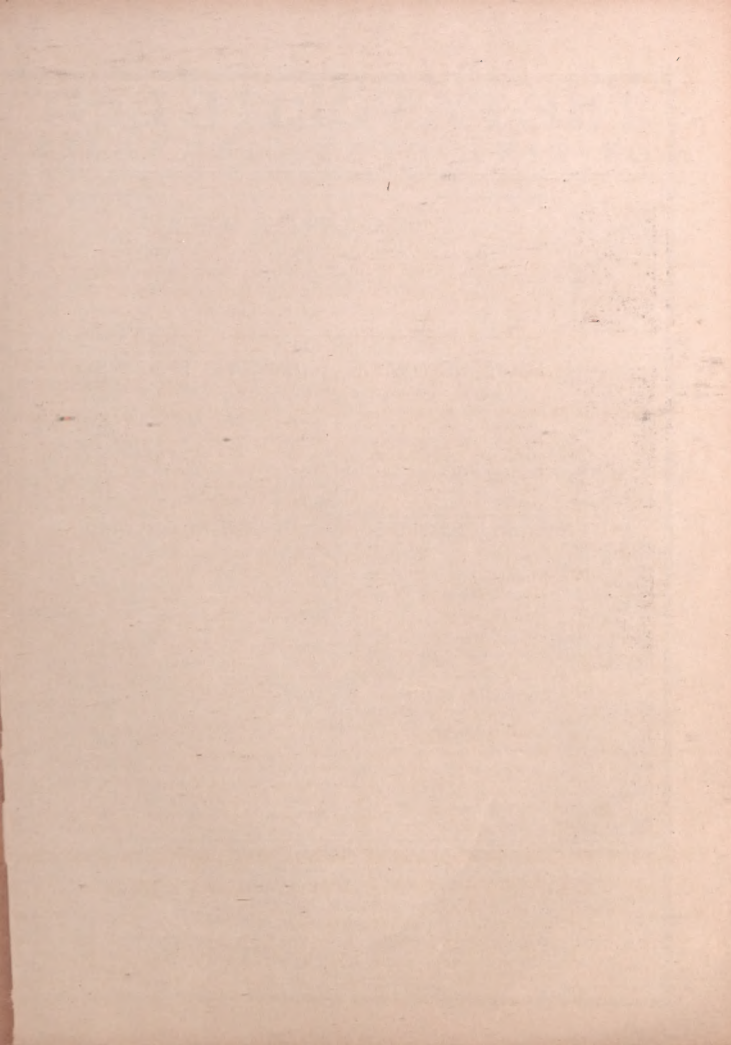
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